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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., AND BLACK POWER  
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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the  
School of Theology at Claremont

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Religion

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by  
John Knox Hagar  
in  
June 1968

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## CHAPTER I

### MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., BEFORE BLACK POWER

The story of Martin Luther King, Jr. begins with his return to the South in 1954. It begins here because his return to his homeland was not a matter of course but a matter of struggle and decision. King had received offers from two churches in the East and three colleges had offered excellent positions. While considering all these possibilities, King received an invitation to preach from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church of Montgomery, Alabama, since they were looking for a minister.<sup>1</sup> Now began the struggle. After years of education in the North, could he again return to a system which he had "abhorred since childhood"?<sup>2</sup> Could he raise children in the bonds of segregation without hurting them? Was there a chance in the South for him to meet his full potential?

Martin Luther King finally decided to return to his homeland in spite of all the drawbacks for him and his family. Indeed, it was the very problem which produced the drawbacks that ultimately determined the issue. The South was his home, and so he wanted desperately to help to destroy that monster, segregation and discrimination, which tried to drive him away. As King put the matter, "We had the feeling something remarkable was unfolding in the South, and we wanted to be on hand to witness it."<sup>3</sup>

The shock of the return was great. After living in the North for

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., Stride Toward Freedom (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

so long without at least the external signs of discrimination, King saw with new eyes the debilitating horror of segregation. He again felt the sting of the Jim Crow laws. He again felt the psychological and cultural shock of the back of the bus and "peanut gallery" seating and separate rest rooms and waiting rooms.

Even more startling, King again experienced the psychological trauma of the Negro caught in this trap. He saw his race passively accepting these unearned burdens. In fact he soon came to see that this passivity and acceptance constituted the major problem.

To complicate the picture even more, those Negroes who had escaped the system seldom turned back to help their brothers. There was too much risk of losing the small ledge upon which they stood if they returned to help a brother up the mountain toward economic security. And even those leaders who were concerned showed a discouraging lack of concern for unity. King concluded that the reality of discrimination had created three responses in the Negro community which only made the problem more intractable.

As time went on, I discovered several things in the Negro community which needed to be remedied before any real social progress could be made. First there was an appalling lack of unity among the leaders . . . indifference in the educated group, and passivity in the uneducated group. All of these conditions had almost persuaded me that no lasting social reform could ever be achieved in Montgomery.<sup>4</sup>

There was then a two-fold problem in Montgomery. There was, on the one hand, the direct problem of breaking down the institutional walls of segregation. This was the problem with the white community. There was, on the other hand, the problem with the black community--the problem of

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

rebuilding the pride and dignity of broken men, the problem of replacing apathy and acceptance with action and dignity and pride. Now he needed a tool for the satisfying of these two needs.

# I

Nonviolent resistance grew more out of an event than out of a theory. The decisive event for the beginning of the bus boycott in Montgomery and for the beginning of a large scale movement of nonviolent resistance in the South was the arrest of Mrs. Rosa Parks. Mrs. Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955, in downtown Montgomery for refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white man.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Parks was something of a community leader, and immediately the arrest stirred cries of protest in the Negro Community. The unrest grew until action was taken, and a boycott was called. The notice of the boycott circulated throughout the community, and a movement was born. The notice of the boycott is as powerful as it is direct and simple.

Don't ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or any place on Monday, December 5. Another negro woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to give up her bus seat. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. If you work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk. Come to a mass meeting, Monday at 7:00 p.m., at the Holt Street Baptist Church for further instructions.<sup>6</sup>

The beginning of nonviolent resistance in the South was, in King's opinion, not the application of a theory by a self-conscious group of reformers. It was instead the reaction of Christian leaders to Mrs. Parks'

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

arrest. Nonviolent resistance as a philosophy of social change did not at first form and guide the movement. Rather the guiding principle in the response of the Negro community to the arrest was the principle of Christian love.

It was the Sermon on the Mount, rather than the doctrine of passive resistance, that originally inspired the Negroes of Montgomery to dignified, social action. It was Jesus of Nazareth that stirred the Negroes to protest with the creative power of love.<sup>7</sup>

Although the movement did not begin consciously with the principles of nonviolent resistance, it soon became apparent that nonviolent resistance was the perfect tool for the expression of Christian love in the situation of segregation. This philosophy, drawn out of an interesting collection of thoughts from Gandhi and Thoreau, became the keynote of the struggle for freedom in the South.

Having made this initial comment about the origin of nonviolent resistance, it is necessary to define it far more clearly. King, himself, defined the theory behind his movement in seven principles. Although these will need more explanation in subsequent sections, these principles can be stated as our starting point.

(1) Nonviolence first of all is a policy of action and courage and is passive only in the sense that physical force is not used. It is not passive nonresistance to evil, it is active nonviolent resistance to evil,<sup>8</sup> and the language of the movement is full of demands for action and militant cries for confrontation.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 72 ff.

(2) Nonviolent resistance demands the capacity to accept suffering without retaliation.<sup>9</sup> Again and again we have seen the fruits of this principle in the confrontation of Negroes and police dogs and fire hoses and cattle prods, in which the Negro amazingly refused to retaliate.

(3) The nonviolent resister not only avoids the ravages of external violence but also the internal ravages of hate.<sup>10</sup> Here King has extended the ennobling qualities of nonviolent resistance into the psychological life of the resister. To refuse to hate is to avoid the self-debilitating aspects of hate. The dignity and self-esteem of a man must increase considerably when he refuses to hate the men who abuse him.

These first three principles begin to solve the problem of pride, dignity, and self-esteem for the Negro which King saw as one-half of the problem in the South. The nonviolent resister is actively engaged and not passively defeated. Apathy is transformed into action. But this resister also is fighting with dignity which surpasses that of his oppressor, for he refuses to hate the man who beats him and even accepts the suffering which must come when he resists.

The next three principles begin to solve the other half of the problem as King saw it--the need for reconciliation between black and white, the need for integration of the Negro into the total society.

(4) Resistance is directed against the forces of evil rather than against the persons who happen to be doing the evil,<sup>11</sup> for the element to be defeated is the evil and not the men perpetrating the evil. This principle

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



makes acceptance between the races possible when the evil has ceased.

(5) Not only is there no attack on persons as such, only on evil, but also there is no attempt to defeat or humiliate the opponent.<sup>12</sup> In King's thinking this leaves open the possibility, after the strife, of winning his friendship and understanding. "The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community."<sup>13</sup>

(6) King then gives a statement of the possibilities for reconciliation in nonviolent resistance. It is also a statement of the Christian origin of the philosophy at least for King. Nonviolent resistance is the application of agape to the problem of conflict. It is a willingness to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality. It is the "recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated . . ." and that agape is the "only cement that can hold this broken community together."<sup>14</sup>

(7) Finally King expresses his basic optimism in this early period. He trusts that we live in a moral universe. He professes a strong faith in the future. Behind the movement and the application of nonviolent resistance and his hopes for the success of such a plan is his belief that "There is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole."<sup>15</sup>

Thus, from just a cursory glance at the rudimentary principles of nonviolent resistance, we can see two primary factors at work. The primary needs of the Negro community in Montgomery where the need for dignity-pride-self-esteem-unity on one hand, and on the other hand the need for a full and

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

equal integration into the privileges and opportunities of the community as a whole, i.e. true reconciliation between the races. These two needs coincide with the two strengths of nonviolent resistance: (1) It unifies and ennobles the resisters, and (2) it leaves the door open to reconciliation. It is no wonder that nonviolent resistance became the tool for the struggle toward freedom of the black community of the South.

In the following sections, we will investigate more thoroughly the two primary thrusts of King's nonviolent philosophy. We will then make some comments about the kind of total context into which King places the whole philosophy.

## II

As one reads through the early writings of Martin Luther King, it becomes apparent that his first big concern in the South was not for full and perfect integration but for self-respect in the black community. He saw that the Negro could never gain the advantages of the whole society until he had the courage and self-respect to demand them. Interesting examples of this are the actual demands made by the bus boycott organization. The resolution called for three changes:

1. Courteous treatment by the bus operators was guaranteed;
2. Passengers were seated on a first-come, first-served basis--Negroes seating from the back of the bus toward the front while whites seated from the front toward the back;
3. Negro operators were employed on predominantly Negro routes.<sup>16</sup>

The first demand concerns the simple human dignity of being treated with courtesy. The third demand asks that Negro operators be used in a white

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

bus system but it only asks that they be used on predominantly Negro routes. The critical second demand in fact recognizes the continued existence of separation between the races. It only asks that the bus be filled on a first-come first-served basis so that Negroes will not suffer the indignity of having to give up a seat for a white man. The primary concern here is not immediate and total integration. This resolution asks only that Negro dignity be observed.

Self-respect through unified action was the first goal to be reached, and the dynamics of self-respect were dignity, courage, and strength. The best tool for achieving precisely these attributes was nonviolent resistance.

King's writings are full of moving stories illustrating dignity in nonviolent resistance. When the movement began to succeed in Montgomery, the opposition turned to an old state law against boycotts and began to make mass arrests. In the spirit of the movement, Negroes responded without fear with an incredible kind of dignity as they flocked to the police stations to be arrested or to see if their names were on the rolls of those to be arrested. King interpreted their response in terms of new found dignity when he said: "A once fear-ridden people had been transformed. Those who had previously trembled before the law were now proud to be arrested for the cause of Freedom."<sup>17</sup>

He relates another incident in the mass meetings when a white minister read the famous conclusion of the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians. When he came to the final verses concerning becoming a man and

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

putting away childish things, the congregation broke into applause and shouted and cheered and waved handkerchiefs "as if to say that they knew that they had come of age, had won new dignity."<sup>18</sup> King even interprets the results of their victory in Montgomery not in terms of concessions won but in terms of maturity and dignity gained through nonviolent resistance to evil. "It is a victory infinitely larger than the bus situation. The real victory was in the mass meeting, where thousands of black people stood revealed with a new sense of dignity and destiny."<sup>19</sup>

Along with the dignity of finally standing up to the white man on even more moral terms than the white man's terms, nonviolent resistance called for far more courage than previously had been expected of the Negro in the South. Courage flowed out of dignity. The knowledge of morally surpassing the white man gave the Negro the courage to stand up to the white man's abuse in his protest. The shift in mentality was little less than incredible. During the boycott struggle in Montgomery, the usual night riding visits of the Ku Klux Klan occurred. But one night Negroes left their lights on and doors open. Some stood out on the porches and watched the caravan of hooded figures driving past. A few Negroes even waved at the passing cars. King writes that "after a few blocks the Klan, nonplused, turned off into a sidestreet and disappeared into the night."<sup>20</sup> Courage flowed into the hearts of Negroes when they stood up with dignity and nonviolence to that before which they had always cowered.

And out of a new found dignity and courage came a new strength for

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

the Negro masses. King interprets their mass movement together as a sign of new united strength. "Voluntarily facing death in many places, they have relied upon their own united bands for strength and protection."<sup>21</sup> The Negro discovered a new tool in joining together with courage and dignity. He discovered in forcing a victory in the bus dispute that courageous, dignified action together for the cause of his freedom was effective. He could in fact make gains. He could in fact force changes. His very dignity in unity was a powerful weapon for the gaining of rights. But perhaps even more important, in giving to the Negro courage, strength and dignity it finally began to break down the apathy and fear which had paralyzed the community. This new tool for nonviolent resistance seemed to solve one-half of the Negro's problem in the South.

### III

The first job to be done in Montgomery was the dignification, unification and activation of the Negro community. But there is no question but that for Martin Luther King this unification through passive resistance was accomplished ultimately for the reconciliation of the races. For King the organization and use of power was to lead ultimately to reconciliation. We saw this emphasis in the basic tenets of nonviolent resistance in the first section. Not humiliating, not defeating the opponent, not hating the opponent, but suffering without retaliation, leave open the possibility for reconciliation. But, we must go a little deeper to see fully what is behind

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

this strong drive toward reconciliation and integration of the races.

In a passage from his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", King gives a clear example of his basic orientation toward integration of life at all levels. Here he speaks narrowly of the political-social arena, but it is symbolic of his general mode of thinking. He bases his philosophy on a belief in the mutuality of all men. For King, man is inseparably bound up with his neighbor, in fact, with all men for, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."<sup>22</sup>

Because King sees all men intimately tied up together, they should become reconciled to each other. This means that any course which his movement takes, any strategy which he employs, must ultimately lead to the reconciliation of the races.<sup>23</sup> He sees the direct action of nonviolent resistance doing exactly that. First of all, this strategy leads to reconciliation by counting on the basic decency of most white men.<sup>24</sup> Non-violent resistance presents a clear moral outrage when men, demonstrating peacefully for their rights, are attacked by their oppressors and do not strike back. This in itself draws the normal law abiding citizen closer to the Negro position simply because this more moderate white man "would never sanction the use of violence to preserve the system."<sup>25</sup> The use of nonviolent resistance leads to reconciliation simply because it unites men in the black and the white community who are repelled by the moral outrage of violent attacks upon defenseless men.

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<sup>22</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't Wait (New York: New American Library, 1963) p. 77.

<sup>23</sup>King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 148.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

Secondly, nonviolent resistance employed in direct action leads to reconciliation because it leads to negotiation. King was challenged by a group of Southern white ministers to explain his position. It was claimed that his direct action led only to increased hostility and the creating of tensions. These ministers questioned sit-ins and demonstrations and marches and pleaded for negotiation instead. King answered that negotiations were exactly what he sought. He argued that nonviolent direct action so highlights the problems and creates such a crisis for the whole community that negotiation is inevitable. It is for King a way of forcing to the negotiating table a community which has consistently refused even to admit the presence of the problem.<sup>26</sup> This constitutes, therefore, a move toward reconciliation, because now the problems are recognized by both sides and they are at least talking together about them.

King's call for reconciliation through confrontation rests on faith in the basic decency of most men. This is a statement of optimism which is quite common for King in this early period. In the introduction to *STRIDE TOWARD FREEDOM*, King looked back on the movement as a whole and made this optimistic interpretation: "By the end of the bus struggle, it was clear that the vast majority of whites preferred peace and law to the excesses performed in the name of segregation."<sup>27</sup> Nonviolent resistance depends for its success on this belief in the basic decency of most men. The dynamic of passive resistance of any kind is the moral admiration which

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<sup>26</sup>King, *Why We Can't Wait*, p. 79.

<sup>27</sup>King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. x.

is evoked when the demonstrators persist in spite of hardship. If most men do not respond with a basic kind of empathy, then the movement can accomplish nothing.

King also saw that the success of the movement in accomplishing reconciliation depends upon the active support of some elements in the white community. He was appreciative of that small number in the white community who went beyond the minimal demands of mere human decency to give active support to the movement.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Martin Luther King supported reconciliation even while he sought to unify the black community into a force to be dealt with. And he believed that his use of nonviolent resistance was the best tool for reconciliation because it called men of common decency to admit the presence of a problem and to discuss it rather than to suffer the long nights of violence and lawlessness. It is a little surprising just how successful he thought the movement had been in reconciling the black and white communities. In looking back over these events and those of the following summer, he concluded that the demands that the Negroes had dramatized and defined in the demonstrations of nonviolent resistance had been more or less accepted as reasonable by whites not holding a vested interest in segregation. "The summer of our discontent, far from alienating America's white citizens, brought them closer into harmony with its Negro citizens than ever before."<sup>29</sup>

#### IV

We have seen that nonviolent resistance operated to unify and to

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 121.



reconcile. These are the two major thrusts in King's thinking, but the mind of Martin Luther King is indeed complex. These two themes are not held in isolation. These theories fit into particular religious, social and legal contexts. We will now investigate these levels to come closer to the full richness of King's concept of nonviolent resistance.

The religious context for King's position in nonviolent resistance is the Christian religion. We noted earlier how the movement in Montgomery began with Christian principles of love and not with a subtly developed moral and social philosophy. When King justifies in detail his position in these early days, he does so primarily religiously and morally, for "at the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love."<sup>30</sup> For King this means Christian love, agape love.

King defines agape in several ways. He sees it as disinterested love, in which the individual seeks the good of the other before his own good.<sup>31</sup> He also sees agape springing from the need of the other person.<sup>32</sup> Both of these religious concepts lead directly to nonviolent resistance as a moral force for King. The disinterested love of agape would lead even the oppressed man to seek the good of his oppressor and, thus, to open the road to reconciliation. The agape which considers the need of the other man, leads King to a concern for the welfare of the white man whose bigotry is destroying him spiritually. King says that the Negro must love the white man because the white man needs his love to remove the insecurities and fears of prejudice.<sup>33</sup> Both aspects of agape lead to reconciliation.

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<sup>30</sup>King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 85.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Agape for King is also an active force. Far from being weak or passive, it sets out to create community in the face of forces which destroy community.<sup>34</sup> King sees this at the very core of reality. "He who works against community is working against the whole of creation."<sup>35</sup> This, too, implies reconciliation between communities, black and white, but it also implies the creation of community among the Negroes for the sake of developing the full humanity of blackmen, and so it implies organization for action.

Finally, agape means for King that all of life is interrelated.<sup>36</sup> So agape drives a man past all barriers to communion with all his brothers.

In addition, King's call to action itself is grounded in his religious system. King was challenged by an outspoken segregationist in the Methodist Church who claimed that religion had nothing in common with King's social action program. King in answering attributed the fact that he was working at all in the social realm to the demands of the gospel. King emphatically believed that if one is at all devoted to Christianity, then he must work to eradicate social evils.<sup>37</sup>

King then draws a moral conclusion from his theological position. If God is calling men to live by expressing agape then violence is indefensible. King sees this in a practical light too. He sees a cycle of violence and hate that has been created by the retaliation of violence for violence between the black and white communities. This cycle can only lead downward and must be broken. For King it would seem to be up to the morally superior man to break the chain by refusing to return hate for hate and violence for

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

violence. To do anything else only "intensifies the existence of hate in the universe."<sup>38</sup>

And finally in this religious context, for King it is possible to break the cycle through the gamble of nonviolence precisely because the universe itself is working toward justice. In another moving passage he writes: "We have kept going with the faith that the arc of the moral universe though long is bending toward justice."<sup>39</sup> King sees God at work in the midst of the freedom movement.<sup>40</sup> It is for this reason that he trusts the future, that he trusts nonviolent resistance to remain nonviolent, and that he ultimately believes that reconciliation is possible and mandatory.

King's search for black unity and black-white reconciliation is also set in a context of tension. King sees the hand of God bringing the black man and white man together, but he sees this being accomplished in nonviolent resistance through the application of creative tension.<sup>41</sup> So for King tension is not to be feared but to be used.

This takes place on several levels. First of all, it is very important to note that at this point King is talking about nonviolent tension. He even used tension creatively to avoid violence. King spells out in great detail a little understood fact of life in civil rights revolutions. People accuse the leaders of inflaming crowds or leading men to violence. Yet King is aware that he is riding a wave of Negro indignation and cannot keep that wave from breaking. He can only try to keep the inevitable expression of

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>41</sup>King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 79.

hostility channeled into creative forms. In discussing the campaign at Birmingham he noted that it was the people who moved the leaders and not the opposite and that he must go where the movement goes--a point of immense importance for his later shifts in attitude toward Black Power.<sup>42</sup>

When such a people begin to move, they create their own theories, shape their own destinies, and choose the leaders who share their own philosophy. A leader . . . must be sensitive to the anger, the impatience, the frustrations, the resolution, that have been loosed in his people.<sup>43</sup>

The potential for violence was already there. King believes that a critical function of nonviolent resistance was to give that tension a creative outlet and to avoid useless rioting throughout the South.<sup>44</sup>

An expression of the tension that surrounds the movement is the strong, militant language in which everything is phrased. The demonstrators are known in the movement as an army with generals in command.<sup>45</sup> In another image King compares the movement to a surgeon who cuts boldly to remove the "knife of violence" that was so close to the heart of the nation.<sup>46</sup> It also must be kept in mind that when King uses the militant language of force and tension, he is speaking of the "soul force" of truly creative, nonviolent resistance. Thus, the images are of war, but the intention is for a meaningful and lasting peace between men of good faith in both races.

Tension as we saw earlier is also used by King to bring the opposition to the conference table. This tension is not trumped up by the leaders of the movement, but is the dormant but highly hostile tension of an oppressed people. Thus, it is a tension which already exists. It is the substituting

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

of reality for a "sort of negative peace"<sup>47</sup> in which the Negro continued to eat humble pie. The only true absence of tension is justice. Since King tries to expose this tension for what it is and bring his people to justice, then his use of tension becomes creative and is justifiable since it can lead to true and final peace.

There is still one more very important qualification of King's use of tension. King at one point compares his attempts to exercise the boycott with the uses of the boycott by the White Citizens Councils in the South. Both use a boycott but while the attempt of the Councils was to destroy the black man economically, King consciously refused to use power to destroy his opponent.<sup>48</sup> The use of tension and power by King is seen as redemptive and reconciling. It is always an attempt to confront a man and to convert him but never to destroy him.

Thus, in the context of tension, King attempts to unify his people and reconcile them to the white power structure as it changes to accept them and their rights. He uses the tension which already exists in the hearts of the oppressed to confront the white community without destroying it and to bring it to the kind of negotiation which can lead to reconciliation, and which in the mean time can prevent the explosion of the entire community. This is the creative use of tension, a redemptive use of power.

Finally, the twin objectives of nonviolent resistance are seen firmly in the midst of a context of law. King was challenged by a group of ministers over the problem of anarchy. The movement insists that its

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<sup>47</sup>King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 88.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

opponents follow the law and yet they themselves do not. Does this not lead to anarchy? Is there any chance for social order and justice if there is no respect for the law?

King wrestled with these problems, for he recognized that he was breaking the law and that this was a serious question. King finally answered the question on two levels: (1) the appeal to higher law, and (2) the appeal to moral law.

The appeal to higher law means simply the appeal to the law of the land, to the United States Constitution. The problem for King was more complex than simply whether or not to break the law. The problem was which law to break and which to uphold. King time and again explains his breaking of the local ordinances by appealing to the higher law of the Constitution. Thus, in the bus boycott in Montgomery, they finally won the dispute when the Supreme Court declared the bus segregation law unconstitutional.<sup>49</sup> King in breaking the law is not declaring himself exempt from the legal system, which would be anarchy. Instead he is affirming the legal system by appealing to a higher context of law. He operates within the legal system to change the laws. He does not operate outside of the legal system to destroy law generally. This is seen clearly in an obvious implication of nonviolent resistance. The resistor must also be willing to go to jail for resisting. It is also seen in the support that King gives to the legal work of NAACP.<sup>50</sup>

The appeal to moral law is more complex. King believes that one has a moral obligation to disobey unjust laws and that in doing so, he is showing

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>50</sup>King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 53.

the highest respect for the law.<sup>51</sup> For King any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. In the spirit of Martin Buber he writes: "Segregation substitutes and I-it relationship for an I-thou relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. Hence segregation is . . . morally wrong and sinful."<sup>52</sup> Thus, the most "lawful", or moral, act would be to break the unjust law for the sake of causing it to be replaced by a just law.

But again the principles of nonviolent resistance make all the difference here between creative resistance and anarchy. For the man who would break the law must do so openly and lovingly and with a willingness to accept the consequences.<sup>53</sup> King writes:

Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice<sup>54</sup> . . . I submit that an individual who breaks the law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.<sup>55</sup>

The whole nonviolent-resistance movement is conceived as a search for justice. It breaks the law only in relation to a higher law or to a moral law, and it accepts the consequences of its act. Thus, King's concept of nonviolent resistance shows the highest respect for the law and operates continuously within the context of law considered in its highest sense.

## V

What then can we say in summary about Martin Luther King before Black Power? King reveals in his writing and his action two major concerns.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-84.

He is concerned to unify the black community into a force which can present itself with power, dignity, and self-respect. At the same time he is concerned that this confrontation occur for the purpose of ultimate reconciliation and integration. There is a tension here, but King tries to overcome it through the use of nonviolent resistance. He thinks that he can be militant enough to unify an angry black community. Then with the creative tension of passive resistance, he hopes to express that anger so that the whole situation does not blow up and so that when changes are made, because of the power of love, reconciliation will still be possible. It is analogous to performing on a tight rope. If he leans too far either way, he will fall off either into passive uselessness or into active fomentation of riots, and King feels this tension. As far back as the Montgomery bus boycott, he was concerned with a "sobering dilemma." How could he make a speech for the first mass meeting that was militant enough to keep the people aroused to positive action and still sufficiently moderate so that the fever did not go beyond "controllable and Christian bounds."<sup>56</sup> This is the tension through which we will watch him move in the following chapters. It is what King does with that tension in the fact of Black Power that determines the course of his story.

And as we have seen King, while operating between these two horns of his own philosophical dilemma, also operates within several contexts which give the stability and final definition to his philosophy and to his use of nonviolent resistance. Thus, King's views on the use of power through non-

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<sup>56</sup>King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 49.



violent resistance are shaped by his deep tie to Christianity and Christian love leading to reconciliation. They are shaped by his moral optimism concerning the future. They are shaped by his concepts of power as creative tension. They are shaped, finally, by his strong allegiance to the law, considered on the higher plane of just and moral law.

Martin Luther King resides somewhere in the midst of this theological, philosophical collage. If we keep in mind the poles of his concern, unity of black men and reconciliation of all men, and if we keep in mind his whole atmosphere of beliefs about religion and power and law, then we will be able to see just what kind of new or refurbished Martin Luther King emerges from his brush with Black Power.

## CHAPTER II

### BLACK POWER

Martin Luther King, Jr. saw two equally serious problems confronting the black man in this country. He must gain a sense of pride and dignity, and he must be allowed to enter fully into the mainstream of American life. King's entire system of thought moves along the continuum between these two. Black Power on the other hand sees the problem as so very intense in the first area that it totally disregards the second. While King lives in the tension between the two, Black Power breaks that tension. It considers the two mutually exclusive. The problem of pride is so intense that the Negro cannot solve it while trying to beg his way into the very white power structures which destroyed his self-image in the first place. To understand fully the emphasis put on pride by Black Power advocates, we should take a careful look at what they see to be the desperate situation of the Negro in this country.

#### I

"A lot of times, when I'm working, I become despondent as hell and I feel like crying. I'm not a man, none of us are men! I don't own anything. I'm not man enough to own a store; none of us are."<sup>1</sup>  
This statement by a Negro man, age about 30, states the central thesis of

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth B. Clark, Dark Ghetto (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 12.

the book by Kenneth B. Clark, Dark Ghetto. Clark sees the Negro as psychologically emasculated by the white man's invisible war of fear and prejudice. He sees the Negro, by and large, forced to live in a slum ghetto, as a man who looks all around him at the "opportunity" for living the good life as seen in American mass media. This man then looks at himself and his rat infested home, poor diet, crumbling family life and apparent lack of hope for improvement. This man too often then sees himself as innately inferior to all other men. Clark writes:

The pathologies of the ghetto community perpetuate themselves through cumulative ugliness, deterioration, and isolation and strengthen the Negro's sense of worthlessness, giving testimony to his impotence . . . Whatever accommodations they make to the negative realities which dominate their own lives, they know that their fate is not the common fate of mankind. They regard their predicament as a consequence of personal disability or as an inherent and imposed powerlessness which all Negroes share.<sup>2</sup>

The basic "truth" of the Negro life as he encounters the white world is the wall of prejudice and discrimination. The Negro "learns" that he is basically inferior; that is, in the words of James Baldwin, "He really believed what the white man said about him."<sup>3</sup> Clark shows that this leads in turn to behavior which "justifies the stereotype." Such behavior is delinquency seen as rebellion, apathy interpreted as laziness, lack of job skills because of apparent irrelevance of education and job training, and lack of social or family stability due to the rigors of a poverty situation interpreted as an innately weak moral nature. The ghetto Negro learns that he is inferior, acts out this belief, and then is again convinced

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>James Baldwin , The Fire Next Time (New York: Dial Press, 1963), p. 18.

that he is inferior because of the results of the action. In Clark's opinion this is the trap of race prejudice and poverty in the United States today. This is the core of the pathology of the Negro situation. Clark spells this out in more detail. It will be useful to follow his argument, for many of the areas he covers are the direct concern of Black Power.

Clark points first to economic and social decay as a root of Negro negative self-image. Concentration of population is itself partly responsible for decay. Most Negro ghettos are highly concentrated. In Chicago 65% of the Negroes live in tracts which are 90+% black.<sup>4</sup> In New York, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Washington, Cleveland, St. Louis, New Orleans and Chicago the percentage of Negroes in the "ghetto" areas varies from 93.9% to 97.9%. The actual concentration of Harlem is so high that if you put an equal proportion of people in all the other boroughs of New York City, all the people in the United States would fit into this area.<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt that the areas in which most Negroes live are overcrowded and that this leads to social and economic decay. Decay comes also because much--in fact most--ownership of property and business in the black communities lies outside the community. It is owned either by whites or by Negroes who have moved to more exclusive black suburbs. So in Harlem there is only one large department store, and it is owned by whites. Only one bank and one savings and loan in Harlem are owned by Negroes. Apartment houses, stores, businesses, bars, concessions, and theaters are owned for the most part by people living outside the community who take the profits

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<sup>4</sup>Clark, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

home at night.<sup>6</sup> Clark catches the whole situation in a poignant remark:

The dark ghetto is not a viable community. It cannot support its people . . . The ghetto feeds upon itself . . . In general a ghetto does not produce goods of lasting worth. Its products are used up and replaced like the unproductive lives of its people. There are 93 funeral homes in Harlem.<sup>7</sup>

Such social and economic decay inevitably leads to a spiritual and moral decay, a charge so often layed at the doorstep of the Negro. Thus, it plays a large role in creating the desperate nature of the Negro situation.

Another desperate factor in most Negro communities is housing decay, a fact which grows out of the economic decay mentioned above. Harlem houses 232,792 people in three and one-half square miles. Ninety percent of the residential buildings are more than 33 years old, and nearly one-half of them were built before 1900.<sup>8</sup> Multiple use of toilet and water facilities, inadequate heating and ventilation and crowded sleeping quarters are common and lead to general levels of poor health. The parks are crowded, and many children play in the streets amidst heavy truck traffic. Far more children are killed in Harlem by cars than in any other part of New York City (6.9 per 100,000 population vs. 4.2 per 100,000 for the whole city).<sup>9</sup>

Still another root of desperation for the Negro is unemployment. One out of every seven or eight adults in Harlem is unemployed. Clark writes that across the country the picture is much the same. Unemployment of Negroes is rising much faster than unemployment of whites. Among young men eighteen to twenty-four, the national rate is five times as high for Negroes as for whites.<sup>10</sup> The problem is not just one of getting jobs. It

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

is also difficult for the Negro to get a job that measures up to his level of training and the level of pay which that training should receive. Negroes who have completed four years of college can expect to earn only as much in a lifetime as whites who have not gone beyond the eighth grade.<sup>11</sup> When a Negro cannot get a job or cannot get the job his training deserves, it must mean to him that the society considers him innately inadequate. Here are the roots of Negro negative self-image, the roots of Negro desperation.

Many other problems could be cited which lead to negative self-image: the instability of the home, the matriarchal dominance, lack of knowledge of Negro heroes, lack of real representation in government, constant abuse by the white authorities with whom they have contact. All of the Negro's contact with the white world seems to teach him one lesson. The psychology of the situation forms a trap for him. The trap is self-negation which feeds upon itself in an atmosphere of projected, expected, and finally experienced frustration and failure. The problem festers. The desperation deepens. It is this hopelessness and desperation and self-doubt which Black Power attacks.

## II

Black Power took hold as a freedom slogan in the march at Greenwood, Mississippi. James Meredith had begun a march across Mississippi to dramatize Negro courage, and he had been shot. King and other civil rights leaders rushed in to continue the march. Among them was Stokely Carmichael, of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. As the march proceeded the mood

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

began to shift away from nonviolent resistance to a new key. King had always based the marches on inclusion of sympathetic whites and the adherence to nonviolence as an expression of love. Now some startling new feelings began to be voiced. As the group walked down the highway, there was much bitter talk and many questions.

"I'm not for that nonviolence stuff any more," shouted one young activist.

"If one of these damn white Mississippi crackers touches me, I'm gonna knock the hell out of him," shouted another.

"This should be an all-black march," said one marcher.

"We don't need any more white phonies and liberals invading our movement. This is our march."<sup>12</sup>

Here was a much darker mood than characterized earlier marches. Here were the elements of separatism and white hate and readiness for violence which King had tried desperately to avoid. This was only a local beginning, but it was characteristic of incidents to come all over the United States. It is therefore useful to see the direct cause of this local shift in mood away from nonviolent resistance of Martin Luther King to the pride motifs of Black Power.

King attributed this shift in mood and strategy to the experience of SNCC in Mississippi during the summer of 1964.<sup>13</sup> A large number of white students had come down to serve in Mississippi that summer.

What the SNCC workers saw was the most articulate, powerful and self-assured young white people coming to work with the poorest of the Negro people--and simply overwhelming them. That summer Stokely and the others in SNCC had probably unconsciously concluded that this was no good for Negroes for it simply increased their sense of their own inadequacies.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 25.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

This is exactly a reaction to the desperate problem of Negro self-image outlined at some length in the first section. Here in the birth of Black Power, even while it is still only a slogan, we can see the attempt to get at the core of Negro feelings of inadequacy. Even here at this very early level, we can see the breaking of the tension between Negro pride and black and white reconciliation for the sake of treating the far more serious problem (to the Black Power advocate) of Negro pride. In fact, we can see reconciliation being rejected in order to establish pride. This sacrifice of reconciliation for the sake of self-improving pride will become the keynote of Black Power as we see it developed. This incident in Mississippi was only a recognizable "beginning" of Black Power, but it was consistent with all that was to follow.

### III

We have said above that Black Power is basically a breaking of the tension between Negro pride and self-improvement on one hand, and the hope for integration into the larger community on the other. It is essentially the sacrifice of reconciliation today for the sake of Negro improvement today. There are vast differences among the various adherents to Black Power, but they all come together to some degree on this one pole of King's two-poled model. And it is apparent that this is a response to the desperate situation of the Negro in the ghetto as it is outlined above. The call for pride, self-determination, and self-improvement all are calculated to fight the desperation of the Negro's self-devaluation. But it is still necessary



to define the movement or collection of movements far more clearly. The Black Power movement can be understood under three general headings: separation, power, and violence. It is the particular application of each of these areas to the tension of our polar model for King, that separates them from the Martin Luther King we saw before Black Power.

(1)

Separation in one form or another is a key to Black Power. Just what this separation means depends upon which Black Power advocate one is quoting. This ambiguity is common to all the definitions of Black Power, and so there are several concepts of separation within the Black Power movement.

In spite of the complexity of its meaning and application, the basic causes for the desire for separation of black man and white man are more or less the same at all levels. We mentioned above the psychological trauma for the black man living in a white world. This does not simply take place in the ghetto. It has invaded the civil rights movement itself. This comes out most clearly in a position paper written by SNCC in the summer of 1965 which became the ideological basis for their participation in the Black Power movement.

SNCC saw the same lack of Negro initiative and the same negative self-image in the civil rights area as exists in the ghetto. The organization claims that Negroes were never allowed to organize themselves. In the context of slavery, organization, of course, was impossible. Even in the

twentieth century, the civil rights organizations that did exist were either organized by or dominated by whites.<sup>15</sup> This is a reflection of intimidation and lack of initiative brought on by that intimidation. The position paper sums this up:

Negroes in this country have never been allowed to organize themselves because of white interference. As a result of this, the stereotype has been reinforced that blacks cannot organize themselves . . . Blacks in fact feel intimidated by the presence of whites because of their knowledge of the power that whites have over their lives . . . If people are to express themselves freely there must be a climate in which they can do this . . . Whites must be excluded because the efforts . . . cannot succeed because whites have an intimidating effect.<sup>16</sup>

It is exactly this domination or intimidation in one form or another which has caused the cry for separation. The intimidation may be political, or economic, or psychological, or organizational, but apparently for all those men attracted to Black Power, the intimidation is present in some form. The only solution for them is some sort of separation. Lyncoln Lynch put the matter strongly when he said: "We need black people standing on their own two feet and all the shouts of Freedom Now are meaningless and empty phrases until we accomplish this."<sup>17</sup>

Another common reason for the cry for separation is a growing awareness of the differences in outlook between the two races. Whether or not this difference is real, the proponents of Black Power almost universally agree that the black community and white community have different backgrounds and objectives. This again shows up most clearly in the civil rights movement. The SNCC position paper mentioned earlier notes the difference in

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<sup>15</sup>New York Times, August 5, 1966, p. 10, col. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.      <sup>17</sup>New York Times, June 22, 1966, p. 24, col. 3.

experience between the white and black people coming into the movement. It notes that white people cannot relate to black experience or black food, "hog's head cheese, pigs feet, hamhocks," and cannot relate to slavery or even to black religion or the Negro church.<sup>18</sup> SNCC sees a basic cultural difference which brings misunderstanding between the races, and it chooses separation over the attempts toward reconciliation which it considers futile.

This conviction about differences in interests and outlook shows up on a broader scale as pessimism about the concern of the white power structure for the Negro community. More and more, we see expressions of Negro discontent with the white power structure, which will not respond to their needs. With this discontent comes the desire to turn within to the members of their own community and do for themselves what the government will not do. A collection of these statements reveals the matter clearly:

Today most of us have come to the conclusion that integration is not meaningful. The blacks don't want to be integrated. They have lost faith in the United States government.<sup>19</sup> --Gloria Larry, Field Secretary for SNCC.

History has shown that if you're really depending on a vast majority of whites to help, you're really depending on a broken reed.<sup>20</sup> --Lyncoln Lynch, Associate Director of CORE.

These statements of disappointment are not limited just to the civil rights community. When Robert Kennedy toured the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of New York for a study of the problem, he got similar comments from local Negroes.

I'm weary of study, Senator, very weary . . . The Negro people are angry, Senator, and judge that I am, I'm angry too. --Civil Court Judge Thomas R. Jones.

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<sup>18</sup>New York Times, August 5, 1966, p. 10, col. 2.

<sup>19</sup>New York Times, June 5, 1966, p. 75, col. 3.

<sup>20</sup>New York Times, June 22, 1955, p. 24, col. 3.

I'm tired Mr. Kennedy. We got to have something concrete now, not tomorrow, not yesterday.<sup>21</sup> --Ruth Goring, Assistant to Brooklyn Borough President.

Thus, separatism grows out of the intimidation of the Negro by the white man, a sense of growing cultural differences and goals, and the disillusionment of the Negro community concerning any hope for reform by the white community.

While the causes of separation may be similar across the whole spectrum of the Black Power movement, the degrees and types of separation suggested are radically different. Here the true complexity of the Black Power movement begins to come into sight.

At the most extreme level is the separatism of the Black Muslims, who call for absolute separation of the races.<sup>22</sup> This will not take place immediately, but will take place eventually and come in stages. All personal relationships must be broken immediately. Then as time and circumstances permit, the economic strings will be cut and finally even political separation into Negro states or cities or suitable political units will be achieved.<sup>23</sup> At this first stage, then there is a small group within the Negro communities seriously talking about total physical separation.

There is a type of separation being called for within the civil rights groups themselves, which is similar to, but not nearly so radical as, the separation of the Black Muslims. Some desire to convert their groups into strictly black organizations. We saw this theme above in the March at Greenwood. The debate over inclusion of white liberals became even sharper

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<sup>21</sup>New York Times, February 5, 1966, p. 17, col. 2, 3.

<sup>22</sup>Eric C. Lincoln, The Black Muslims in America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 88.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

in the march to Jackson in June of 1966. In this one march the whole spectrum of civil rights organizations had to take a stand on the inclusion of the white liberal. King accepted white support gladly and thanked white northerners for joining in the march. Mc Kissick of CORE took a middle position. He welcomed the participation of the whites but insisted that the Negroes control the decision making. The representative from SNCC took the most separatist position. He wondered aloud if whites ought to be on the march at all. Finally, Roy Wilkins of NAACP and Whitney Young of the Urban League took the strongest stand in favor of support of white structures. They refused to participate at all in the march because the march's manifesto was too critical of President Johnson. They feared it might damage their relationship to the President and to liberal congressmen.<sup>24</sup> Thus, throughout the civil rights organizations, we find a whole range of attitudes toward separation. They range from King's inclusion of whites at all levels, to CORE's inclusion of whites in participation but not planning levels, and finally to SNCC's policy of not firing white organizers but letting them work only among whites. The forms of separation may differ within the movement, but it is clearly a growing theme.

Separation for some also takes the form of no involvement in white government. In a Baccalaureate Address at Howard University, Adam Clayton Powell called on Negroes to abandon the conference table and to seek a position of "audacious power."<sup>25</sup> This was precisely the course taken by SNCC a few days earlier when they withdrew from a White House Conference

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<sup>24</sup>New York Times, June 12, 1966, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>25</sup>New York Times, May 30, 1966, p. 10, col. 4.

on civil rights.<sup>26</sup>

The corollary to the withdrawal from white government is the call for black government. This is usually intended in a far more moderate sense than the total separatism of the Black Muslims. It occurs rather in calls for black control of police and fire departments in large Negro urban centers.

The most common type of separation which cuts across the largest portion of the civil rights movement is the rejection of the goal of integration. This is implicit in what we have already seen of the Negro religion-culture groups. The total separation of the Black Muslim obviously means no integration. Such Negro-culture groups as Ron Karenga's US, who seek to establish Negro values and cultural symbols, also have no interest in integration.<sup>27</sup> We have already quoted the statement by SNCC which rejects integration as a goal. As we will see later even King's organization, judging from its relative silence on the question, has at least postponed this goal to some future date. Separation as the rejection of integration seems to be the most widespread form of separation within the Black Power movement.

This drive toward separation, regardless of its many forms, has one primary rationale. Through separation black men hope to remove the intimidation by the white man psychologically and politically. The Black Power Negro wishes psychologically and politically to take his fate into his own hands. He sees that this can only come about after he gains sufficient political, economic, and social power. Power to run his own life or

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<sup>26</sup>New York Times, May 24, 1966, p. 28, col. 3.

<sup>27</sup>New York Times, May 27, 1966, p. 30, col. 5.

to contribute as much to running it as any white man contributes is the goal of separation in black power. Separation is to take place just so that the black man can find this power. It is power itself which is his final goal, and those Negro leaders who think it can be attained without separation (King, Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins) are much more silent on the separation issue. It is to the question of power that we must now turn.

(2)

The Black Power Negro is searching for the power more fully to control his own life. He is seeking power in three broad areas--political power, economic power, and what I choose to call cultural power.

The search for political power goes on at several levels, and in some cases it is not at all new to the civil rights movement. For years before Black Power, the civil rights movement was concerned about voter registration and the electing of Negro representatives. Until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, their participation in elections in the South was slight. Since the passing of the act and the mass registration of Negro voters that followed, there is legitimate hope for placing black men in the white political structure. By January of 1966, Negroes were involved in runoff elections for sheriff in two counties in Alabama and were seeking seats in the State House of Representatives in the counties of Perry, Sumter and Marengo and running for lesser office in Greene and Choctaw.<sup>28</sup> Participation in the electoral system itself and the mass support of the black voter

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<sup>28</sup>New York Times, January 31, 1966, p. 29, col. 2.

for the black candidate and black programs is one form of political black power.

Other forms of political power are sought which are more in line with the stronger separatists sentiments. One major plan is suggested by such leaders as Powell and Karenga. It involves the gaining of political power and a degree of separation at the urban level. In a recent visit to the School of Theology at Claremont, a representative of Karenga's organization explained their demands that the administration of Watts be turned over to the people of Watts. They demanded that Negroes be hired as policemen and firemen. This is, of course, a common demand in predominantly Negro neighborhoods. They also demanded that the Police Department of Watts be made functionally a separate unit to be controlled by the people of Watts through their elected officials. This style of demand also included other urban services. They were, in effect, asking for relative autonomy for a large urban Negro area. They were very close to asking that Watts be made a separate, self-contained city, occupied and controlled by Negroes.

This apparently will be the style of demand from Black Power groups for political power in the future. Adam Clayton Powell, who has been clever enough to read the signs correctly and thrust himself into the vanguard of this movement, summed up the new trend: "Black Power does not by any means suggest that black people will take over the whole nation, but it does mean that Black Power will be the controlling force in big cities as they become blacker."<sup>29</sup> In defining Black Power in his address at Howard University

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<sup>29</sup>New York Times, July 19, 1966, p. 22, col. 3.



Powell said: "To demand these God-given rights is to seek black power . . . what I call audacious power . . . the power to build black institutions of splendid achievement."<sup>30</sup> In whatever form it manifests itself, the drive for control of their own political life is a major segment of the drive for power.

The drive for power includes also the goal of economic power. The statistics given in the beginning of this chapter are sufficient to show that the Negro may have moderate buying power but seems to have almost none of the economic power which comes from ownership. Little help comes from the government's poverty program. Attempts to correct this have occurred in Black Muslim circles for some time. Not only are they taught to be thrifty and industrious, but they are also encouraged to "pool their resources and techniques" in merchandising, manufacturing, building, maintenance, in fact in all industries in which they participate.<sup>31</sup> Above all, they are instructed to "buy black."<sup>32</sup> Thus, there is an attempt to gain some of the economic power of our society by concentrating all of their economic resources together cooperatively.

There are similar calls for economic power from the main line civil rights organizations. A rally to create a unified front for Black Power was held at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York. At this meeting, Floyd Mc Kissick listed six goals for Black Power that were subsequently approved by the entire conference. Of the six, two concerned economic power. The conference agreed to work to develop strong consumer power

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<sup>30</sup>New York Times, May 30, 1966, p. 10, col. 4.

<sup>31</sup>Lincoln, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

and to develop economic power, which apparently meant gaining the economic power of ownership.<sup>33</sup> The same kind of emphasis occurs in statements by leaders in SNCC and CORE. At their convention in Baltimore in July, 1966, CORE approved the use of Black Power as its new strategy. Mc Kissick tied this down to economic power almost immediately in his statement.

The black masses have not been elevated by the anti-poverty program. As long as the white man has all the power and money, nothing will happen, because we have nothing. The only way to achieve meaningful change is to take power.<sup>34</sup>

It is possible to point to only a few examples of the realization of economic power from Negro ownership, such companies as the Sons of Watts franchise for a service station in Watts, and a few all Negro theater organizations and one small motion picture company in Watts. So far, no clear strategy for realizing power has come out of the movement. This is partly by design in some camps. Stokely Carmichael recognized the lack of a clear plan in remarking that he didn't have any master plan, but that he believed only in putting power into the hands of the poor and "letting them make up their own plans."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of the absence of a clear plan, the seizure of economic power interpreted as both the goods of society and the ownership of the facilities to produce those goods, is a primary strategy of the Black Power movement in its quest for power.

The third form of power which the Black Power movement seeks is cultural power. This is Black Power's answer to the Negro identity crisis. Above we noted the particular problem of converting negative self-image into

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<sup>33</sup>New York Times, August 15, 1966, p. 18, col. 3.

<sup>34</sup>New York Times, July 5, 1966, p. 1, col. 4.

<sup>35</sup>New York Times, May 22, 1966, p. 4, sect. IV, col. 1.

a positive picture. Black Power tries to convince the Negro that what the white man has said about him is false. There is an emphasis on Negro history and Negro heroes. The Negro is taught to respect his race and to revere its heroes. In short, he is given a heritage beyond the heritage of slavery and is given an identity beyond that of the ghetto man. Negro art and theater is encouraged for the special expression of Negro themes.<sup>36</sup> Some organizations even refer back to the African heritage for the Negro to establish for him a new identity within a new culture. Ron Karenga has established just such a group--US. Karenga describes US: "We are free men. We have our own language. We have our own customs and we name ourselves. Only slaves and dogs are named by their masters."<sup>37</sup>

In giving the Negro a new identity within a new heritage, Black Power leaders hope to improve the whole moral atmosphere in which the Negro must live. Thus, the Black Muslim is subject to strict laws forbidding drinking. The sexual ethics of the group are puritanical, and the muslims show a strong concern for the regeneration of criminals.<sup>38</sup> Certainly any device which will free the Negro from the self-defeating moral traps of ghetto life is an aid to power. It is with this hope in mind that the new identity is established in the midst of a new heritage. This is the goal of cultural power.

We have reviewed the Black Power quest for separation and for power. It is necessary also to see these two working together, for they fit together to create race pride which is a key theme for the movement as a whole.

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<sup>36</sup>New York Times, March 19, 1966, p. 21, col. 6.

<sup>37</sup>New York Times, May 27, 1966, p. 30, col. 5.

<sup>38</sup>Lincoln, op. cit., p. 82.

The man who can pull himself apart from his oppressors and then gain political, economic, and cultural control over his own life so that he has become his own man again, is a man who has found pride. It is the picture of the Negro pulling himself up by his own bootstraps politically and economically that stirs pride in the heart of the Black Power advocates. Because of their emphasis on the first pole of our model for King, pride is the key to the future. This is stated majestically in the words of Lyncoln Lynch: "The White man will not respect you until you can stand toe to toe, eyeball to eyeball with him."<sup>39</sup>

(3)

The third strong motif of Black Power is violence. Black Power is based on the principle of ingrouping and outgrouping. Black Power attempts to unify the black community at all costs. Race pride and some degree of separation for the sake of race pride are its goals. In order to develop a strong ingroup, it is usually necessary to reject all men outside the group. Thus, a polarizing of groups results, and tension between the groups begins to build. If there is no conscious attempt to control the negative feelings for the outgroup, violence is quite likely to result. If the grouping arises in the first place because of the abuse of one racial group by another, the potential violence is intensified. This is exactly the situation for Black Power today. Potential violence in one form or another is a real part of the movement in almost all of its strata. As the desire

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<sup>39</sup>New York Times, June 22, 1966, p. 24, col. 3.

to integrate into the larger society decreases, the desire to avoid violence also decreases. In some instances, the violence is even seen as a tool to force concessions from the white power structure. Violence does not have to result, if the white power structure does not stand too long in the path of Negro improvement. But if roadblocks continue, there is no strong restraining wall of Christian love to hold back the wrath of the abused.

At the most radical level violence for the sake of revolution and destruction is advocated. Paramilitary Negro groups exist in the country and do plan forms of violent sabotage. In March of 1966, a large arms cache was found at the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem.<sup>40</sup> In January, 1966, a Black Muslim was indicted for threatening the life of President Johnson.<sup>41</sup> But this strata is small and highly unrepresentative of most of the Black Power movement.

On the other end of the scale, the smallest amount of violence advocated is the violence necessary for self-defense. This degree of violence seems to be advocated throughout the entire movement. This commitment to self-defense rather than passive resistance grew out of the experience of Negroes who were beaten and abused for months during the freedom marches and demonstrations in the South. At the CORE national convention, Mc Kissick discussed this matter: "If you want a doctrine of nonviolence, you can't have white people who practice violence and expect black people to remain passive. Nonviolence is a two-way street. If you want nonviolence then the white people must also practice it."<sup>42</sup> Just as the first public growth

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<sup>40</sup>New York Times, March 19, 1966, p. 21, col. 6.

<sup>41</sup>New York Times, January 15, 1966, p. 11, col. 6.

<sup>42</sup>New York Times, July 3, 1966, p. 28, col. 4.

of the Black Power slogan grew out of the march at Greenwood, so in that same incident James Meredith, the man who had been shot, renounced non-violence in favor of self-defense. "I'm sorry I didn't have something to take care of that man. I'll never again expose myself in Mississippi without protection." At this point, a reporter noted that this did not sound nonviolent. Meredith replied: "Who the hell ever said I was nonviolent? I spent eight years in the military and the rest of my life in Mississippi."<sup>43</sup>

Just one step beyond self-defense, there is talk of retaliation. The brother of Medger Evers, Charles, announced his intention to retaliate in the future to atrocities committed against the Negro.<sup>44</sup> This is all the more surprising because Evers is the Mississippi State Director for NAACP, which is usually the most conservative of the Negro organizations.

In the middle ground of the Black Power movement are those leaders who apparently are toying with the idea of using violence as a tool to force concessions. In June, 1966, Willie Ricks, Field Secretary for SNCC told a crowd that if Negroes are not represented in the capitol building and state-house and courthouse, they ought to tear down the buildings.<sup>45</sup> Dick Gregory made the same kind of calculated threat while speaking at a white high school in Connecticut: "We're going to tear this country apart if we have to . . . If Americans want law and order without justice, they are going to have to have one cop per Negro in America."<sup>46</sup>

The call to the coercive use of violence is difficult to evaluate. We must keep in mind the necessity of the leader to stay on the cutting

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<sup>43</sup>New York Times, June 8, 1966, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>44</sup>New York Times, May 28, 1966, p. 9, col. 3.

<sup>45</sup>New York Times, June 20, 1966, p. 20, col. 3.

<sup>46</sup>New York Times, February 12, 1966, p. 56, col. 1.

edge of militance to keep control of his movement. We must also keep in mind the tremendously unifying effect of such inflammatory language. It is still not clear to what extent these Black Power leaders are committed to violence as a coercive tool in the fight for freedom.

But this much is clear. Violence in the Black Power movement will be used as it becomes practical and useful. There is no commitment in much of the movement to nonviolence, and violence now is being considered seriously as an operational tool for coercion.

Thus, Black Power is the full development of pride and Negro unity and self-improvement at the expense of any present possibilities for reconciliation in integration. It involves separation of the races, the quest for economic, political, and cultural power all for the sake of pride and self-improvement and has in it the seeds of violence if that self-improvement is blocked too long. It seeks the destruction of the tension between unity of blacks and reconciliation of blacks and whites, for it sees no hope in the white community.

#### IV

The reactions of the white community and black community to Black Power complete our picture of this movement. These comments will prepare us also to see the depth of the problem which Black Power forces on King. In them, we will see the awesome temptation for King to change.

The reaction of the white community was predictable. In the face of growing militance, the government aligned itself with the most conservative

of the civil rights groups.<sup>47</sup> This was the typical liberal reaction. In the face of threat, this group stayed within the movement but hid in its most conservative element. Thus, Hubert Humphrey attacked Black Power as a new kind of racism, picking up the elements of separation and violence as most important. "Racism is racism--and there is no room in America for racism of any color. Integration must be recognized as an essential means to the end we are seeking."<sup>48</sup> President Johnson was more blunt in his appraisal of the situation. He noted that we would lose many gains if we do not realize that while there is a 10% Negro minority, there also is a 90% white majority.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, in spite of conciliatory comments by Mc Kissick that Black Power is not black supremacy and white exclusion, white America was polarized. Liberals chose the most conservative strata in the civil rights structure and moderates and conservatives reacted with outright hostility. As the black movement began to move left, the white community began to solidify to the right.

Response in the black community showed a similar polarization. Black Power appealed to the young and drew vast numbers away from the more conservative rights organizations. This was recognized by leaders of the NAACP when they called a conference to discuss what they called the "tragic gap." The gap between the law and its enforcement was large and growing larger. One NAACP official saw that this was leading the young to impatience and toward the militance of Black Power. He observed: "Unless there is rapid progress, we are going to have a damming up of disillusionment, and at some

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<sup>47</sup>New York Times, July 7, 1966, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>New York Times, July 21, 1966, p. 1, col. 1.



point the dam will break."<sup>50</sup> But the most telling indication of the beginning of an abandonment of King's style of civil rights protest is the financial abandonment of the main line civil rights organizations. In 1966, SCLC contributions fell more than one-third. The contributions to CORE and even to SNCC fell fifty percent. Thus, the final result of Black Power in 1966 was the polarization of America. Whites retreated into an attack on reverse racism and violence. Negroes began to move toward the far more attractive pole of the quicker solutions by violence and separatism. The American community seemed in danger of splitting beyond the possibilities of immediate reconciliation.

## V

Black Power in 1966 challenged Martin Luther King to do battle with his own philosophy. This new movement presented problems to King which challenged him to change or be passed by. It is his reaction to these challenges which finally determined the shape of the "new" Martin Luther King after Black Power. A short list of these problems will set the scene for the crucial discussion of the next chapter.

The separatism of Black Power threatens the entire framework of King's thinking. King before Black Power was convinced that the future of America was all tied up to one strand of destiny. How was he to respond to this new challenge?

The potentially violent militance of Black Power also threatened King's world. King was practically committed to nonviolence because he saw

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<sup>50</sup>New York Times, May 17, 1966, p. 21, col. 1.

that it was necessary for reconciliation, and reconciliation was his final goal. He was morally committed to nonviolence because of the Christian basis of his philosophy and his optimistic trust in the decency of men and the moral nature of the universe. How was he to respond to this new challenge when he came to see that the white man was far less ready for change than he had hoped?

Finally, how was King to stay in control of the civil rights movement at all? If he did not change his stand on the first two questions, then how could he hope to command attention? Yet within the context of his strong commitment to his religious and moral beliefs, how could he hope to change? King faced the same problem that he faced at the very beginning in Montgomery. How could he appear militant enough to this new context to command attention without sacrificing his principles or leading his people down the path of unrestrained and self-defeating violence? King's complex answer to this question finally reveals the shape of Martin Luther King as he faces Black Power today.

## CHAPTER III

### MARTIN LUTHER KING AND BLACK POWER

Martin Luther King's response to Black Power is complex. King is a highly principled man and a highly practical one. The fight between these two considerations makes his response the highly complex reaction we would expect from a great man. But an attempt to unravel this complexity can be made. There is an order to King's response that may be partly chronological or partly the simultaneous working of opposing forces on his mind. At any rate, there are three stages of reaction through which King moves. This movement is toward Black Power. Just how far King moves is the point of argument.

Before we consider the three stages of King's reaction, several overall reactions may be considered. These initial reactions show King moving toward a confrontation with Black Power. They illustrate the ambiguity of King's reaction even at the beginning and reveal in him the growing fight between his own optimism and the pessimism of events as they bore down on him. They set the stage for King's struggle with himself.

By 1966, King saw clearly the polarization of America into black and white. He saw clearly the negative reaction building in the white community to the civil rights fight, and he saw Negro impatience with the apparent roadblock of white backlash. Yet at this first stage he remained optimistic and philosophical. King interpreted all this as the "inevitable counter-revolution that succeeds every period of progress."<sup>1</sup> He saw no great reason

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 12.

for pessimism here. He was disturbed that some Negroes declared that no progress at all had been made. He wrote:

The inevitable counterrevolution that succeeds every period of progress is taking place. Failing to understand this as a normal process of development, some Negroes are falling into unjustified pessimism and despair. Focusing on the ultimate goal, and discovering it still distant they declare no progress at all has been made.<sup>2</sup>

For King Black Power was a little premature in its pessimism.

Another immediate reaction to Black Power which continues to the present is King's evaluation of the progress that has been made and the kind of battles to come. Up until the Voting Rights Act of 1964 was passed, the civil rights struggle was a fight for decency. The Negro sought only those small measures which ensured that he would be treated as a human being without gross brutality or radical subjection.<sup>3</sup> Now the struggle would be for equality, both economic and political.<sup>4</sup> This is a struggle King realized that the white community might not be ready to lose. White America was ready to see that the Negro be "spared the lash," of brutality and degradation, but "it never had been truly committed to helping him out of poverty, exploitation or . . . discrimination."<sup>5</sup> King saw that it was to be a new and much harder fight for freedom in the future.

Paradoxically, along with his philosophical optimism there is a strong note of pessimism and discouragement. Black Power was not alone in its disillusionment with white America. As far back as 1963, King saw the same intransigence toward change that inspired the impatience of the Black Power movement in the first place. He listed several causes of mass

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

disillusionment, and they read like an exercise in bad faith on the part of the white community. School desegregation was so slow as to be partially nonexistence. Almost ten years after "Brown vs. the Board of Education", two percent of Negro children in the South attended integrated schools. In some sections only one percent were integrated. King listed disillusionment with both political parties as a cause of unrest, and this was to increase after 1964 when the country went to sleep after passing the cure-all 1964 Civil Rights Act.<sup>6</sup> He also listed as far back as 1963 the hardening fronts between the races and the rise of freedom abroad in Africa as contributing factors to the growing tension.<sup>7</sup>

By 1966, King's disillusionment had deepened considerably. Even after great efforts were made to pass civil rights laws, he felt that "every civil rights law is still substantially more dishonored than honored."<sup>8</sup> School desegregation was still 80% unimplemented, the "free expression of the franchise" was more the exception than the rule in the South. The ghettos still stood in spite of open occupancy laws, and equal employment "was still a distant dream."<sup>9</sup> The depth of King's disillusionment shows through his words: "Legislation is evaded, substantially nullified and unenforced. It has been barred by equivocations and retreats of government--the same government that was exultant when it sought the political credit for enacting the measures."<sup>10</sup>

This disillusionment included the white American for whom he seemed

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<sup>6</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't Wait (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

to have had such high hopes. He cites grimly a poll which indicates that 88% of white Americans would object if their teen-age child dated a Negro. Almost 80% would mind if a close friend or relative married a Negro. And 50% still would not want a Negro as a neighbor.<sup>11</sup> King writes: "White America is not even psychologically organized to close the gap . . . Essentially it seeks only to make it less painful and less obvious but in most respects to retain it."<sup>12</sup> King's disillusionment is intimately tied up with his knowledge that the white and black communities are drifting apart. He sees that the Negro expected far more, and the white expected to give up far less. This is the core of disillusionment, and this is the core of the Negro movement away from reconciliation and integration. It is this movement toward Black Power and white backlash with which he must deal in his nonviolent and reconciliatory heart. He writes:

The work was broken, and the free-running expectations of the Negro crashed into the stone walls of white resistance . . . The paths of Negro-white unity that had been converging crossed at Selma, and like a giant X began to diverge. Up to Selma there had been unity to eliminate barbaric conduct. Beyond it the unity had to be based on the fulfillment of equality, and in the absence of agreement the paths began inexorably to move apart.<sup>13</sup>

This is the complex atmosphere of thoughts which surrounded King as he confronted Black Power. King felt the philosophical optimism of knowing that a new kind of fight had to be fought. This was strangely tempered by disillusionment with white government and white society for their "irresolution and contradiction."<sup>14</sup> In the heat of his disillusionment, he saw also the hopeless continuing split of the two communities. Clearly, King's thoughts

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

and reactions were mixed as he approached his confrontation with Black Power.

# I

On the first level of reaction to Black Power, King was immediately negative. As we saw in the last chapter, Black Power threatens King's entire conceptual framework when it promises to save the Negro without integrating him into the white world. King reacted strongly to the elements that he saw as threatening.

King reacted first of all to the breaking of the tension between Negro unity and black-white reconciliation. His strongest objection was to the goal of separation advocated by Black Power. On one level, he thought it is highly impractical to attempt to pull out. He stated that as a 10% minority, Negroes could not talk "realistically about going it alone."<sup>15</sup> On another level, King believed that most Negroes still want to fit into the American society. In response to statements by Stokely Carmichael condemning integration as a white "subterfuge for white supremacy in this country,"<sup>16</sup> King said: "Generally Negroes are trying to get into the mainstream of American life, and isolationist theories lack appeal."<sup>17</sup>

On still another level King rejected separation as immoral. He saw the heart of this separation in the seeking of power for the Negro without concern for the power of the white and he condemned this. "We must never seek power exclusively for the Negro, but the sharing of power with the white man. Any other course is exchanging one form of tyranny for another."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>New York Times, May 28, 1966, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.      <sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>New York Times, June 21, 1966, p. 30, col. 6.

On this level King was still committed to the integration or at least the reconciliation of the two communities. And so he condemned the strong tendency of Black Power to go it alone.

He also reacted immediately and most negatively to the inherent violence of Black Power. King's primary commitment was to raising the Negro's position in this country and to placing him into the mainstream of American life. The use of violence absolutely defeats the possibilities for achieving this goal. King summarized this position: "My problem with SNCC and CORE is not their militancy; I think you can be militantly nonviolent. It's what I see as a pattern of violence emerging."<sup>19</sup>

King not only condemned Black Power for its tendency toward violence as a tool. He also condemned it for its suggestion that violence in self-defense is appropriate. He remembered that the only restraint for rioting in his own freedom marches was the refusal of his people even to defend themselves with force. He saw a thin line between violent self-defense and violent aggression.<sup>20</sup> Violence in any form at this period was unjustifiable for King, and so he condemned Black Power for its tendency toward violence.

On still another count, King immediately attacked Black Power as a tendency toward reverse racism. He remarked: "Black Power connotes black supremacy and an anti-white feeling that does not or should not prevail."<sup>21</sup> King operated out of a strong religious and moral framework, as we have seen. The racism of Black men was just as odious to him as the racism of white men, because it is racism itself that he was fighting. But even if there were not

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<sup>19</sup>New York Times, July 9, 1966, p. 8, col. 4.

<sup>20</sup>New York Times, July 6, 1966, p. 15, col. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



this moral issue, King would have rejected black racism simply on a practical consideration. The racism of the black man cuts off chances for reconciliation as surely as the racism of the white man, and so they must both be eliminated. He summarized this concern: "A doctrine of black supremacy is as evil as a doctrine of white supremacy. The Negro needs the white man to free him from his fears. The white needs the Negro to free him from his guilt."<sup>22</sup> The supremacy of racism in any form was rejected by King, and so on this ground his immediate reaction to Black Power was negative.

There is still one more element in King's immediate negative reaction to Black Power. King saw Black Power as essentially a negative phenomenon. It was for him a reaction to the misuse of white power, and it defined itself over against the negative elements of the white community. Thus, Black Power is violent because the white man is brutal. Black Power encourages separation because the white community has built walls for so long. It is racially proud because the white community is racially prejudiced and destroys Negro self-image. Finally, it is impatient because it is desperate in the face of white intransigence. King called it a revolution of despair and said:

Revolution, though born of despair, cannot long be sustained by despair. This is the ultimate contradiction of the Black Power movement.<sup>23</sup>

It's negative values prevent it from having the substance and program to become the basic strategy for the civil rights movement in the days ahead.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>New York Times, July 11, 1966, p. 1. col. 6.

<sup>23</sup>King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

Thus, King reacted immediately to Black Power by condemning it. He saw the dangers which Black Power presented to his theologically-based fight for civil rights and equality. He saw its basic aim as Negro unity to the exclusion of reconciliation between the races. Its basic operation threatened King's commitment to nonviolent resistance. The inherent violence, separatism and reverse racism repelled King morally and practically. So he struck out at the beginning with almost total rejection of the movement. At this early stage King seemed convinced that his polar concern for pride and integration was still valid. He dismissed Black Power in the summer of 1966 with these comments:

I see no significant trend in the country toward black nationalism. The civil rights movement is generally opposed to this philosophy. It is really a very small segment that turns to such measures.<sup>25</sup>

Black Nationalists have never attracted large numbers of Negroes. Generally Negroes are trying to get into the mainstream of American life.<sup>26</sup>

## II

The next phase in the reaction of Martin Luther King to Black Power began in early 1966 when he extended his fight for freedom to the large cities of the North. And here we enter a time of confusion and ambiguity. The path becomes very difficult to follow, for King is changing. But it is not clear just exactly where or how. The clearest starting point is King's campaign in Chicago in early 1966.

King went to Chicago to fight for freedom with the same tools that

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<sup>25</sup>New York Times, June 21, 1966, p. 30, col. 1.

<sup>26</sup>New York Times, May 28, 1966, p. 1, col. 2.

he had used effectively in the South. The fight was far more complex than might have been expected because the target was not clear. In the South, the white power structure had presented an unambiguous moral target. Men marching peacefully for their natural freedoms were attacked and abused by the sheriff and his deputies and then put into jail by the court. For most of the nation, it was a clear case of right and wrong, and the villains were easily observable.

But when King went to Chicago, nonviolent resistance ran into a road block. The power structure seemed to be friendly. "Mayor Daley greeted his (King's) arrival in Chicago by asserting that the city's slum eradication program was well under way and that the city was pleased to have Dr. King join in."<sup>27</sup> Mayor Daley then distributed "fact sheets" to the local ministers to show them what the city had done without King. One observer noted that Daley "had always beaten his enemies by taking their programs and running with them."<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the ground was cut from under King's movement. Without the moral example of Negroes nonviolently confronting the violent white power structure, his movement seemed to have no steam at all.

King seemed to realize that a new strategy was called for. He seemed to realize that the only hope for putting fire back into his movement was to become more militant, and this meant moving toward the position of Black Power. Thus, the man who earlier condemned Black Power formed an alliance with the most radical of Black Power groups in Chicago, the Black Muslims.

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<sup>27</sup>New York Times, March 24, 1966, p. 33, col. 2.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

On February 24th, King met with Elijah Muhammed and announced that they would form a common front to campaign against slums.<sup>29</sup> When questioned about this, King replied: "The time has come when we, the Negroes, must see our mutual problems. It is not the time for us to be fighting each other."<sup>30</sup>

King seemed in this gesture to recognize anew the intransigence of the whole power structure and to be moving toward the pole of Negro unity, militance, and dignity and self-help. He was moving away from the pole of immediate integration or immediate reconciliation. But it is not clear that it was all that simple. What is apparent is that this reveals a very important move of some kind by King. It is in the time of confusion and ambiguity and disillusionment that follows this rather symbolic event that we must look for the exact shape of King's shift in strategy and possible shift in philosophy.

(1)

At one level in this time of confusion and change, King begins to change the basis of his attack on Black Power. He continued to argue against it but on new grounds. Before, his attack was primarily moral. But now the attack became practical. King had attacked Black Power immediately because it called for separation of races, while he saw men morally bound to each other. He condemned its violence because violence only increases the amount of hate in the world. He condemned reverse racism because any racism was immoral. But now he condemned the same evils on practical grounds.

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<sup>29</sup>New York Times, February 24, 1966, p. 75, col. 1.

<sup>30</sup>New York Times, February 25, 1966, p. 18, col. 1.

He condemned separation in Black Power as self-defeating to its economic and political goals. He pointed out that the Negro cannot gain the economic and political relief that he needs in isolation. The federal government is the only agency that can solve the bigger economic problem facing the Negro which involve billions of dollars.<sup>31</sup> He admitted that the Negro needs organized strength, but he insisted only the Negro can make the whole thing work through constructive group alliances "with the majority group."<sup>32</sup> King was now arguing that it is simply impractical to expect gains through violence<sup>33</sup> or separatism, and he sees the only hope for power in coalitions. These are all practical condemnations of Black Power and are no longer nearly so moral in tone. After the summer of 1966, the moral arguments dropped almost out of sight.

He now condemned Black Power also on the practical ground of disunity. He thought the use of the slogan brought division into the ranks of the marchers. "For a day or two there was fierce competition between those who were wedded to the Black Power slogan and those wedded to Freedom Now."<sup>34</sup> Again it is important here that he applied the practical criticism and not the moral criticism.

The final and best example of this style of criticism was King's contention that Black Power has no program and is merely a slogan.

In spite of all the talk, King still believed that no viable alternative program to nonviolent resistance had been found within the movement.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 48.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.      <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 47.      <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

Thus, the first sign of a period of shifting of emphasis or strategy was the shift from the moral to the practical denunciation of Black Power. This was a time of confusion. But the direction of the change in King became a little clearer, as he began to move toward Black Power goals while still condemning the dangerous excesses of Black Power and its rationale.

(2)

The next shift for King in his time of confused change was a shift in goals. In 1966 there was a definite switch in objectives to political and economic power through united Negro action, which are the main power objectives of Black Power. We need to look more closely to see the full meaning in this critical change.

Actually the change of goals was several years coming. As early as 1963, King called for a new policy in the civil rights struggle. He wrote:

A new stage in civil rights has been reached, which calls for a new policy. What has changed is our strength. The upsurge of power in the civil rights movement has given it greater maneuverability, and substantial security. It is now strong enough to form alliances and make commitments in exchange for pledges.<sup>36</sup>

By 1966 the new strategy clearly involved the use of more power and the gaining of concessions as a result. "We must use every constructive means to amass economic and political power. This is the kind of legitimate power we need."<sup>37</sup>

He went on to spell out even more clearly his adherence to the positive principles of Black Power. King defined power as the ability to achieve

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<sup>36</sup>King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 147.

<sup>37</sup>King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 29.

purpose and declared that it was necessary in order to "implement the demands of love and justice."<sup>38</sup> This particularly includes political and economic power, for these are the keys to the Negro search for equality and the areas in which he is weakest.<sup>39</sup> Thus, King endorsed the goals of Black Power as he saw their necessity in the new and larger struggle for true economic and political equality.

King also endorsed the call of the Negro by Black Power to mature manhood. He saw the desperate psychological plight of the Negro in the ghetto and recognized the value of calling him to pride and self-respect. King recognized that this was still another form of "legitimate power" which must be developed by the Negro.<sup>40</sup>

But King didn't just agree with the basic economic and political goals of Black Power. He finally claimed them for himself and with some justification. He wrote: "To the extent that Black Power advocates these goals, it is a legitimate call to action that we in the civil rights movement have sought to follow all along and which we must intensify in the future."<sup>41</sup>

Thus, King was moving in emphasis toward the economic and political goals of Black Power but with qualifications. And he wanted to point out that this was not a new set of goals at all. But the emphasis on these goals is new. The goals of the Montgomery bus boycott revolved around the problem of integration. The goals of the Birmingham demonstrations also revolved around forms of integration. But when King started working in the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

North, his goals began to involve the problems of creating Negro unity and creating economic and political gains which only could be gained by such unity.

King seemed to be moving toward the emphases of Black Power in other ways too. Black Power insisted that the white man be excluded from the movement or used in a minor capacity. King moved in this direction, but not quite so far. He stated that the white liberal must now accept a supporting role in the movement but can work still with Negroes in this supporting role.<sup>42</sup> This is an excellent model of King's qualified move toward Black Power. He accepts the need for the Negro to control his own movement. He accepts the need for Negro pride. But he does not let it draw him all the way to separation. King absorbs the Black Power goal into his own system and then converts it so that he can move toward Black Power without breaking his ties to the white community.

In his general attitude toward the white community, King also made a qualified move toward Black Power. There was a new note of pessimism which balanced his previously optimistic interpretation of the sympathy of most Americans for Negro Freedom.

It would be grossly unfair to omit recognition of a minority of whites who genuinely want authentic equality. Their commitment is real, sincere, and is expressed in a thousand deeds. But they generally are balanced at the other end of the pole by the unregenerate segregationists who have declared that democracy is not worth having if it involves equality. The great majority of Americans are suspended between these two opposing attitudes.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 43.



In this statement King moved away from the easy optimism for the white community. He left the door open for reconciliation, but his hopes for anything like rapid change in the white community seemed to have disappeared. Again, we can see King moving toward the pessimism of Black Power without cutting himself off from the white community.

Still another indicator of his move toward Black Power was the new militance of his language. King again and again warned white America of the violence to come if it did not give way. King pleaded that social progress is the only way to prevent riots. "Constructive social change will bring certain tranquility; evasion will merely encourage turmoil."<sup>44</sup> Again King had modified the appeal of Black Power. His statement was not a threat but a clear word of warning to the white community. Behind the statement is the desire to avoid violence. But it is nevertheless a significant escalation of the militance of King's language.

Up to this point, King seems to have changed significantly. His focus of attacks on Black Power have shifted from the moral to the practical. We have seen a call for a new policy to fit the new situation of the Negro in the urban ghetto. We have seen King change the emphasis of his goals from immediate reconciliation in integration to organization of power in the ghetto for securing the political and economic power to demand what is needed. We have seen an increased militancy in King's language and a growing pessimism concerning the support of the white community.

But we must not go too far in stating the extent of King's move toward Black Power. We also saw that in every change toward the pole of unity and

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

power, there was an attempt to leave the door open to reconciliation between the races. Violence was predicted but discouraged. The white liberal was "demoted" in the rights organization but he was still included. The goals of economic and political power were emphasized, but these were merely exaggerations of goals which King always saw in the civil rights movement. And finally all of this new militance, all of this new emphasis on power is still seen by King as a tool for ultimate reconciliation, ultimate integration. And the only proper expression for King even of this new militance is still nonviolence. Even during this period of change, King wrote this manifesto of nonviolence and integration.

In our kind of society liberation cannot come without integration and integration cannot come without liberation. I speak here of the integration in both the ethical and political senses . . . the mutual sharing of power and true intergroup, interpersonal living . . . The American Negro will be living tomorrow with the very people against whom he is struggling today.<sup>45</sup>

Nonviolence is still his tool for gaining this ultimate reconciliation. "Therefore, I will continue to follow this method (nonviolence) because I think it is the most practically sound and morally excellent way for the Negro to achieve freedom."<sup>46</sup> King still is governed by his religious and moral framework. No matter how much his concept of proper tactics may shift, his moral commitment to the well-being of his race and its ultimate reconciliation with the white race does not seem to change. But he certainly feels the pressure on his moral system which comes from Black Power and from his own moves toward its goals and language. Finally, in desperation at the

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

end of a long discussion of the pressures and temptations, King makes this unequivocal statement:

A Black Power exponent said to me not long ago, 'To hell with conscience and morality. We want power.' But power and morality must go together, implementing, fulfilling and ennobling each other. In the quest for power, I cannot by-pass the concern for morality. I refuse to be driven to a Machiavellian cynicism with respect to power.<sup>47</sup>

King will not give up morality for anything, and for him morality means nonviolence and ultimate reconciliation for all men.

We can summarize most easily this period of confusion and change in King's life if we refer again to the polar model presented in the first chapter. Before Black Power, King had created a movement dedicated to two goals. He sought Negro improvement, through pride and unity, and he sought reconciliation between the races based on justice. The tool of this movement was nonviolent resistance which broke the cycle of hate and left open the possibility for reconciliation when the strife was done. And the goal of the movement was ultimate integration into the whole life of the society.

Black Power broke the polar tension, sought Negro unity and power at the expense of any hope of immediate reconciliation and with no desire at all for integration. And this movement caught the imagination of much of the Negro community while alienating the white community. It also seemed to give more immediate expression to the direct needs of the urban ghetto Negro who saw only that he was poor and politically impotent. And so as the movement became more militant and leaned more and more toward unity and power and away from integration, Martin Luther King was in danger of falling by the wayside.

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

But King did change, and his change is charted along that imaginary line between the two poles of his goals. In terms of tactical goals, King moved strongly toward Black Power. Economic and political power for Negro masses became the immediate goals and integration as an immediate goal was forgotten. His language became more militant and the importance of whites in the organization dwindled. But King's strategic goals have not changed. He has moved along the continuum far over toward unity, pride, and power, but he has not broken the tension. The ultimate goal to which he is committed is reconciliation, and that means ultimate integration. The ultimate tool to which he is committed is still nonviolence.

King's practical sense of what needs to be done now leads him toward Black Power. His moral sense of what is commanded by his faith for the future leads him back ultimately to reconciliation through integration, and it is exactly at this level of strategic, long range goals that he inevitably parts company with Black Power. Until he breaks his bond between group pride and interracial reconciliation, he will probably always fight Black Power even while he strives for its goals. For it is the separation of these two which in fact defines Black Power, and it is the combination of the two which defines the moral commitment of Martin Luther King, Jr.

### III

If King has moved closer to Black Power goals, has he also moved closer to the ultimate Black Power methods, the methods of potential violent revolution? The question depends for its answer on our survey of the third and final phase of King's reaction to Black Power.

King's new emphasis on organizing large groups of people for the expression of power is escalating. In the face of continued white opposition in the large cities of our country, King is working to create larger and more powerful units. This could be seen coming in some of King's statements even in 1966. "More and more the civil rights movement will have to engage in the task of organizing people into permanent groups to protect their own interests and produce change in their own behalf."<sup>48</sup>

The extent to which King is now willing to push to accomplish some change is seen in the use by him of several new words in the civil rights vocabulary. In the movement at Montgomery, King said that the demonstrations were not meant to coerce the white man but to move him by moral example. But now the movement has grown impatient and King has made significant change in language. "The Negro cannot achieve emancipation by passively waiting for the white race voluntarily to grant it to him. The Negro is now convinced that white America will never admit him to equal rights unless it is coerced into doing it."<sup>49</sup> This call for coercion by massive protest seems at first to be a remarkable shift in the tactics of King. But we must wait to evaluate it.

The tool for the coercion of white America is to be massive "dislocation" of American cities. According to King's plan, the major cities will be totally disrupted by nonviolent Negroes in massive numbers. Schools will be closed; factories will be passively occupied.<sup>50</sup> The first target is Washington. Congress will be closed; unemployed youth will camp on the

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 125.      <sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>50</sup>New York Times, November 27, 1967, p. 53, col. 3,5.

capitol grounds; and there will be massive sit-ins at government offices.<sup>51</sup> The entire life of a city will be stopped until concessions for Negro freedom are made.

Is this finally the flower of violent Black Power blossoming in the formerly nonviolent heart of Martin Luther King? Certainly it is at least the result of Black Power escalation of militance. But does it fit into the framework of the man of reconciliation? Several questions must be answered in order to answer this key question.

There is first the question of massive "dislocation" and the law. We noted in the first chapter that King operated in the South within a context of law. He always justified breaking the law in the name of a higher law or a moral law.

There does seem to be a considerable shift of position on this point. King is starting this campaign in the very halls of Congress, where he considers much of the problem to be. So he could not be working in support of federal law as such. King has not come to this question yet in his writing or comments. But it is very likely that he thinks he is supporting the higher moral law which guarantees to each man decency and human rights. Yet he is not attacking law as such here, but rather an entire institutional system. This is not an attempt to reform a law as such. It is an attempt to force open housing, and more jobs, and more federal assistance. It seems that King has changed from the principles of Montgomery and Birmingham at least to the extent that he is no longer so clearly working within the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

context of higher law. To that extent, he has drawn even closer to the method of Black Power, whose basic fight is with the white institution itself.

And as soon as we have said this, we can immediately see King again pulling back to some of his original positions even in method. He may be working outside the context of law, but the purpose of the movement will be in a sense to support law. King believes that massive dislocation is a creative tool that will harness the rage of the ghetto for constructive and nonviolent demonstrations. In so doing, they will prevent riots and the cause of law and order will be served. King described the Movement: "It is a method of dislocating the function of a city without destroying life and property. It is the only alternative to a summer of riots."<sup>52</sup>

King concluded that this was the only middle road between inactivity and riots.<sup>53</sup> And there is no question that King intends these demonstrations to be nonviolent. He is now organizing 2000 volunteers and training them to police the movement in Washington. Thus King is seriously attempting to provide the tool which will bring Negro benefits and at the same time provide a safety valve for Negro frustration. Thus he moves to Black Power coercion but not to violence. Even in his most militant movement, King still holds before the nation the hope for Negro improvement on one hand and the ultimate reconciliation of the Negro and the white on the other. The tension between the two is stretching to the breaking point and still King refuses to abandon either of his two original goals. Instead, he has found still one more new

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

tool through which he can respond to the present Negro mood of militance without sacrificing his original principles. King is a remarkably clever man. He has remained a prophet in a time which tried to pass him by. There have been important tactical changes for Martin Luther King. But the vision of a free black man united with a forgiven white man still shines through all he says and does.

#### IV

In spite of the certainty with which I pronounce the judgement above, the question of the future remains an open one. King likes to finish his books with a chapter on the topic, "Where Do We Go From Here?" So it is appropriate to ask, "Where will King go from here?" It is not a closed issue. Up to the present he has maintained his basic position while adapting tactically to the situation as it develops. But can he maintain the tension forever? We have seen that King's rationale has become increasingly practical. An interesting question arises, "Would he change his position in respect to violence or separatism if they were to prove practical in achieving Negro rights?" I suspect that he would not and that he would be passed by, for his positions have been modified always by his theological stand. His conception of the implications of Christianity seems finally to set the limits for how far he can change. Violence is beyond justification within his ethics, and so it seems unlikely that he could change this basic criticism of Black Power. And he interprets separation out of his theological system and so always maintains integration as a far distant but real goal. The



limits to his militance and tactical separatism are determined finally then by his theology.

And so the question of theological change arises. Is there theological justification for those elements of separatism and violence in Black Power which King rejects? If there is, does this open a new and much more militant pathway for him? These are the questions of King's future. We will begin to deal with them in the next chapter when we consider the ethics of power in relationship to Martin Luther King.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ETHICS OF POWER

King wrote that love needed power for the sake of establishing justice.<sup>1</sup> In setting these three together in just this manner, King gave us a key to the course of his ethics of power. The similarity between Paul Tillich and Dr. King at this point is more than pure chance.<sup>2</sup> King wrote his dissertation at Boston on a comparison of Weiman and Tillich, and much of the practical theory which comes out of King's writing reflects his contact with Tillich. Thus, it is useful at this point to approach King again from a new perspective--the perspective of systematic ethics. I am not certain on what other points King agrees or disagrees with Tillich, but their reflections on power are so similar, that it will be useful to present Tillich's view as a model against which to compare King's. In so doing, I hope to raise some of the alternatives to King's concept of power. This may raise the possibility of new directions for King resulting from the possibility of a new ethical interpretation of the use of power.

#### I

Before we delve into the thoughts of Paul Tillich on power, it is useful to look at the general outline of his style of thought. Tillich sees all of life in a context of unity and polarities, of tension and

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't Wait (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Paul Tillich, Love, Power and Justice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960),

harmony. Life is unified at the level of ontology. The elements of life are fundamentally related. "Every being participates in the structure of being."<sup>3</sup> And yet life is caught in tension. These tensions are expressed by Tillich as polarities, and the elements of life as they are actually encountered in our lives fall somewhere on the continuum between these polarities. As they exist between these poles they exist in tension with each pole exerting its attraction toward the element of life. This becomes clear by example, and example can be provided as we examine the polarities themselves.

The first set of polarities is labeled individualization and participation.<sup>4</sup> On one extreme man can be said to be completely individual and self-centered.<sup>5</sup> This is true not merely of man but to some extent of all life. Tillich writes:

Individualization is not a characteristic of a special sphere of beings; it is an ontological element and therefore a quality of every thing. It is implied in a constitutive of every self, which means that at least in an analogous way it is implied in and constitutive of every being.<sup>6</sup>

So all of life, or rather every being in life, participates in individualization. Individualization pertains to the very nature of being, to ontology itself. But at the other extreme all being participates in other beings. While there is individualization there is also participation.

The individual self participates in his environment or, in the case of complete individualization, in his world. An individual participates in the natural structures and forces which act upon it and which are acted upon by it . . . Man participates in the rational structure of the universe through the rational structures of mind and reality.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology  
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), I, 168.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

Thus, man and all of life partakes of both individuality and participation. Both realities in their pure sense form poles to which life is drawn, and man and all of life must live in the tension. As seen by Tillich in this polar tension life is unified and yet diverse, a single reality drawn simultaneously toward opposing poles. The reality of living is the process of holding these opposities in tension and moving between them. Man can be neither totally individual nor totally collective. When we reach the ultimate of one we reach the ultimate of the other.

When individualization reaches the perfect form which we call a 'person', participation reaches the perfect form which we call 'communion' . . . Communion is participation in another completely centered and individual self . . . No individual exists without participation, and no personal being exists without communal being.<sup>8</sup>

Thus life is ontologically unified and yet undergoes polar stress or tension, and it is the maintenance of the tension which defines life.

The second set of polarities is dynamics and form, and it operates like the first. All being is caught between the opposing poles of movement or change and final static form.<sup>9</sup> All life has form and yet it is changing. All change leads to a form and embodies a form. There is no final form without movement and there is no ultimate movement that is not expressed in form. Life involves the tension between the two, and no life exists where that tension is broken. Thus again we see unity of life expressed even in the midst of the tensions of polarity.

The third set of polarities is freedom and destiny,<sup>10</sup> and like the first two this also involves ontological unity expressed within polarities.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

Every being is free by nature of its individualization and yet every being is bound by nature of its participation with other free beings.

Thus, within his very style of thinking, Tillich reveals a view of life that involves unity, the pull toward separation in polarity, and the concern for reconciliation of the elements of estrangement. Life involves the final maintenance of the tensions inherent in the ontological structure of life. The themes here are basic unity, pull toward separation, and pull back toward reconciliation and maintenance of relationship. This style of thinking, this concern for the tension of life toward disharmony and back toward harmony again, becomes clear again in Tillich's view of the quality of power in life and its relationship to love and justice.

Paul Tillich dealt extensively with the relationship of love, power and justice. He saw a unity among them which required that they be considered as a trilogy, and then unity derived from their ontological relationship. We begin with love.

Love for Tillich is related to the very reality of being. In fact, love is an essential reality of being. Tillich says: "Life is being in actuality and love is the moving power of life . . . In man's experience of love the nature of life becomes manifest."<sup>11</sup> Love then is the key to understanding life. Love shows us what life is supposed to be. It shows us what being itself is striving toward as it is realized in life.

Tillich then describes love as the power that reunites that which is most radically separated--namely individual persons.<sup>12</sup> He defines love as

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

the "reunion of the estranged."<sup>13</sup> Thus, love is that quality most representative of true being which strains to reunite all that was together or should be together and has been separated.

He goes on to reveal various qualities of love. Eros and philia are seen as qualities of love which can be ontologically fulfilled by agape.<sup>14</sup> This means that those aspects which we attribute to love such as desire for that which we see as desirable and brotherhood can be fulfilling or less-than-fulfilling depending on the presence of self-giving love. If we experience agape or self-giving love as the core of love, then our sense of brotherhood will be lifted to its highest level and our desire will reflect true desire for what is good. Thus, Tillich refers to agape as the "Depth of love," or "love cutting into love."<sup>15</sup> It is self-giving love that relates all of our other expressions of love to the true nature of life. Self-giving love is in Tillich the key to the quality of life itself and the key to our attempts to be truly living beings. But, it is even more. It is also a force which purifies all other human expressions of love. It is a love which calls forth love.

This can be the basis for the concept of love in King. For King, love is exactly the key to the meaning of life. His entire movement is based on the assumption that the expression of love through nonviolent resistance lifts the lover to the highest human potential of being. In the language of the movement it gives dignity and meaning to a broken man.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

And for King love is a power which purifies. Love calls forth love. When a man allows another man to abuse him and does not respond with hate but with love, there is hope that the man's hate will itself be turned to love.

But most important, love, for King, is that power which reunites the estranged, which holds together the polarities of life which seek to fly apart. Tillich describes this as the uniting of those who once were united or ought to be united. It is not the uniting of the strange but the reuniting of the estranged. King certainly has something like this in mind when he seeks endlessly for some form of reconciliation between black and white men. Certainly King sees, in these two groups, men who ought to be united. And these are men who, if they but escaped the fear of their mutual isolation, could be reunited. King sees the power of love as a force to bring these men together at last. This is the key to the real life, to the nature of being. For King, in Tillich's terms, reconciliation of the races would be an expression of the striving of being itself for reconciliation. Perhaps it is some such power toward reconciliation which King has in mind when he calls again and again for "soul power." To love selflessly for King and for Tillich is to understand existence itself. It is the only right style for living.

Power is related to love in Tillich. But first it is related ontologically to life itself as an expression of the ontological unity of life. Tillich writes: "The will to power is the self-affirmation of life in its self-transcending dynamics, overcoming internal and external resistance."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

All of life is self-affirmation. It is affirming itself as actualized being by overcoming internal and external resistance. Being implies power, and power implies that there is something over which it proves its power. For Tillich that which the power of being is trying to overcome is the power of non-being.<sup>17</sup> There is always the threat in life of non-being, of either literally ceasing to be or of having one's being limited by the force of non-being. Power affirms the self in the face of internal and external forces of negation.<sup>18</sup> This simply means that all men exercise power to affirm themselves in spite of those psychological and physical forces which threaten to destroy or limit their being. Life is power, power expressed for self-affirmation against the possibilities of self-negation.

But the crucial question arises concerning the relation of power and force in coercion or compulsion. Tillich writes: "Power actualizes itself through force and compulsion. But power is neither the one nor the other."<sup>19</sup> Force and compulsion must be used in actualizing power. That is, if the being is to affirm itself it must express power and this power in relationship to other beings involves force or coercion. But Tillich is careful to discriminate the proper amount of force. "That which is forced must preserve its identity. Otherwise it is not forced but destroyed."<sup>20</sup> The proper amount of force for self-affirmation is that amount of force which affirms the self but does not destroy that which is being forced.

And finally love and power are ontologically related. Tillich explains this in these words: "The more reuniting love there is, the more conquered

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 46.



non-being there is, the more power of being there is. Love is the foundation, not the negation, of power."<sup>21</sup> Tillich is using complex language to expound a profound point. Love is that which reunites that which was separated. Non-being is exactly this state of separation. Two men do not exist as men for each other when they are separated. The separated Negro and white are not really men for each other because of their separation. Also, there is fear in separation, and fear is a force of non-being which eats away from within at the possibility for self-affirmation. So the more reuniting love there is, the more conquered non-being. But conquering the forces of non-being establishes and protects the power of being, which is for men the power of self-affirmation. Thus, love leads to power.

For King this has direct application. All about him he sees men who are living lives of self-negation. The powers of non-being, so prevalent in the ghetto, have won out in their lives. These powers of non-being are also represented by the dominance and subjugation of the black man by the white community. The black man must affirm himself. He must overcome the powers of non-being in his life with self-affirmation. Without the power of self-affirmation, he is not even living. This for King is the call to unity and power and self-respect. It is the basis for the first pole of his power philosophy.

But this power must be expressed by the Negro so as not to destroy that which is forced. And the only finally successful force is that which

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

has been tempered by agape. For it is by love that non-being is conquered. It is by love that the separation is reduced. Practically for King, this means that the forces of non-being (hate and prejudice) are only defeated as the separation between black and white men is eliminated. This implies force. A man cannot stand before another man without expressing the force of his self-affirmation unless he is to be destroyed. But the force will be appropriated because it is loving; it does not destroy the other but changes him. And love brings true power of self-affirmations to the Negro because it eliminates the fear which causes the separation and reunites both races, increasing self-affirmation on both sides, as self-giving love increases.

This represents the basis of nonviolent love in King's social search for freedom. Nonviolent love is the force which does not destroy the other but affirms him as important and seeks to reconcile. Violence on the other hand is an inappropriate application of force, for it seeks to destroy the other and not to reconcile him. Without ultimate reconciliation, the separation of men remains. Fear remains, and forces of non-being remain. Being is only affirmed finally when love is expressed. Thus, for King, nonviolent self-giving expressions of power are the only way to bring men together and thus to overcome the forces which seek to destroy men. This is the basis for King's second pole in his power philosophy--nonviolent self-giving demonstrations for reconciliation.

But there is still another step. For Tillich, love must be united with power to destroy what is against love.<sup>22</sup> And this power must be com-

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

pulsory power. This compulsory power is finally justified if it (1) destroys what is against love and (2) does not destroy him who is against love.<sup>23</sup>

This means for King that his expression of power for the sake of love can and must coerce if it is in the name of love and accomplishes reconciliation. The breaking of the law and the forcing of action upon recalcitrant whites is justified ethically if it in fact leads to reconciliation. And it is justified if it does not destroy the society it is trying to change. Thinking in these terms, it may be that the use of "massive dislocation" is on the thin border between useful protest and social destruction, and in this sense comes very close to violating King's ethical system. This is something the future will show us. But it is certain that in the circumstances of potential riots all over the country, it is conceived by King to do just the opposite. He hopes that it will reduce rioting and so remain nonviolent and nondestructive. Even this massive coercion is planned in the hope of reconciliation and not in the hope of destruction of white society. So it is justified within his system.

Love and power thus are united into one self-affirming other-affirming whole. Love must be employed with power to reestablish relationship, but the power is not sufficient to destroy the other but to reconcile him. This is the basis of the tension in King which he cannot release. His system holds love of the other and self-affirmation in tension. One is not really possible without the other. And there is an obligation to attack that which would defeat love with sufficient force to change it but not to destroy it. This

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

is the basis of King's militance in attacking the problem even while he holds the two poles in tension. If King follows Tillich as he seems to, Love and Power are inseparable and must be expressed together. This finally is the basis for pride being drawn to reconciliation and force being converted into nonviolent resistance. This may be the core of King's ethic of power.

Tillich then ties justice into the picture. He contends that everything that is actualized must take a form. "That which has no form has no being."<sup>24</sup> Tillich then defines love in such a way as to tie love and justice together. "If life as the actuality of being is essentially the drive towards the reunion of the separated, it follows that justice is the form which is adequate to this movement."<sup>25</sup> This means that if love is to be real in society it must have a form, and that form is most nearly approximated by true justice. It also means that the reverse is true. True justice must express the movement toward love and toward reconciliation.

This again would have direct implications for King. It implies the necessity of love in society expressed as justice. It is the basis of his high regard for the law. If a law does not lead to the reconciliation of the estranged, then it has nothing to do with justice and must be opposed by force. When force opposes an unloving, unjust law, it is acting in the interests of love and of justice. It is an expression of the highest concern for justice as the form of love actualized in society, for it insists

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

that justice express love and therefore be true justice.

Thus, we see in Paul Tillich's model for the ethical treatment of power one which comes very, very close to the system apparently used by Dr. King. The value of this search is that we can see now why King is so unchangingly wedded to the two principles of Negro self-affirmation and Negro-white reconciliation. They are the expressions of love and power which must go together. Love and power belong together ontologically, and so self-affirmation and reconciliation are inseparable. King did not break the tension in his polar concern because he could not.

And the same is true with his dedication to nonviolence. Unless violence can be shown to be nondestructive to the person against whom it is used, then it too does not fit into King's ontological conception of live. He simply cannot condone violence, because destructive violence which is intended to destroy rather than to reconcile is contrary to the very nature of being itself. It leads to non-being. Only love leads to actualization of being.

Thus, if King follows Tillich as much as it appears, we have come at last to the basic cause of his unchanging philosophy, and the ethical limits of all his attempts to modify his position.

## II

The last question to be considered is now appropriate: "Is there room within this conceptual scheme for basic changes?" If there is, then there can be vast changes in the strategy King uses in the future. But, if there

is no room for change, King will find it probably even more difficult to adapt to the changes of direction in the civil rights movement.

The two key areas which might change, in relation to Black Power are separatism and violence. These are the two areas which most clearly define King's negative response to Black Power. What is their potential for a different theological interpretation?

In the area of violence, King's ethical system is absolutely inflexible. He already will allow self-defense but not as a Christian action directed toward reconciliation. But to go beyond that and use planned violence as a tactic of reconciliation is not possible for King. That kind of violence always implies the destruction of the other and, as such, is an improper use of coercion. It leads to negation of being and not to affirmation of being. It may be that a case could be made for the use of violence to force finally the kind of laws which would ultimately bring reconciliation, but I don't think King would accept this. The side effects of coercive violence would, in King's opinion, cause more self-negation than the consequent laws could neutralize in self-affirmation. Violence as a policy is simply impossible for King.

There is considerably more room for change in the area of reconciliation. The basic goal of reconciliation cannot change, but the path to it can. It seems to me that the anthropology of Karl Barth is most instructive for bringing this out. But first some general statements about theology of Karl Barth will be helpful.\*

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\* I am indebted for the ideas which follow to Dr. Joseph Hough, Professor of Social Ethics, School of Theology at Claremont.

### III

If I were to summarize the total emphasis of Karl Barth as it grows and builds and is stated over and over again throughout the Church Dogmatics, I would have to say that he is most concerned to state the total all pervading and irresistible sovereignty of God. Again and again God is seen as the one who determines man and is not determined by man or even knowable by man until he is revealed in Jesus. This all pervading sense of the sovereign control of God over his creation and creature man affects all the major doctrines which Barth treats. Thus we see its influence in his doctrine of grace and election where man cannot save himself but is confronted by God in the Word. In his doctrine of judgement, Barth concludes from this starting point of the sovereignty of God that man does not even see himself as judged or in need of judgement until he is confronted by God in the act of grace through the Word, and that man can respond to this act of God only as exactly that, a response, an after the fact response to what God has already done. Thus God acts, God saves, God is the one who loves man and redeems him, God judges, God elects and preordains, and man is participant primarily as responder. We need to take this one step farther for a proper introduction to Barth's whole system. When the question is asked, who is God, Barth answers that God is that one who is revealed in Jesus Christ, that one who Jesus refers to as "Father".<sup>26</sup> All that is to be known of God is known only through the revelation of his Word in scripture, in Jesus, and in the work

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<sup>26</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), II: 2, 52ff.

of the Holy Spirit, all three of which are forms of the Word of God which point to Jesus.<sup>27</sup> When we ask then what is God we are directed to Jesus. When we ask what is man again we are directed to the revelation of God in Jesus showing man what his true humanity consists of.<sup>28</sup> Thus the sovereignty of God has been shifted in a sense to Jesus. As revealed in the Word, Jesus is the alpha and omega of human experience and knowledge of man and God. It is this Jesus event that shows us all that we can know of God and all that we can know of the nature of man. Thus we do not look for humanity in Jesus, but rather we define humanity in terms of Jesus. We do not look for divine aspects in the picture of God, but rather we look to Jesus to see God as that one who Jesus declared to be his Father and the same one who related himself to Israel in the covenant. As the revelation of God, the sovereign God, Jesus becomes the center of all theology, all revelation, all knowledge of God and of our life as men. Jesus becomes the Alpha and Omega, the central point of history for which all which went before was preparation and for which all which comes after is result and response. It is in this event of Jesus that Barth finds the central movement of God in history, the redeeming-judging of his people in the context of irresistible sovereignty. It is in this one event of the revelation of grace and judgement, gospel and law, within a context of the sovereignty of God, that Barth finds the Christian experience of salvation.

I spoke at some length of the sovereignty of God above so that what

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>H. Gollwitzer and G. W. Bromiley, ed., Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics, A Selection, (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 162.



follows now might make better sense, for now we arrive at the heart of the matter, the relation of gospel and law, of grace and judgement. Man is saved by God's sovereign action in Jesus. God breaks into our lives in the Word and saves us. This act is so much the sovereign act of God in response to his own will and not to our searchings that Barth says that we are not even aware of the need for salvation until God breaks in in the Word to save us, and this very gift of grace itself is the judgement of man for it reveals to him the state of alienation from God which existed of which he could not even be aware until that alienation was destroyed. Thus for Barth man is judged in the very process of being saved; the gift of grace is itself a judgement on the state of man of which he could not even be aware before the gift of grace. So at the very beginning of the process or event grace and judgement are one event, inseparable.

Barth continues this method of linking the two doctrines into one act when he considers the form of the event of grace. Barth takes so seriously the sovereignty of God, that he sees grace entering human life with the power and authority of command. He sees man as confronted by the grace of God and commanded to respond, and that man's freedom consists precisely in being now free, because God has come to him, to respond to that command of God with a "Yes." If we can indulge in one long quote at this point, the words of Barth will make this whole matter clearer.<sup>29</sup> Thus it seems that because God addresses man in the compelling imperative, because God breaks

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<sup>29</sup>Barth, op. cit., II: 2, 511-2.

into man's life with a compelling word of salvation which in the power and sovereignty of God demands a response, then the breaking in of God with grace in the Word is in fact a command to response. Grace and judgement are united. Sanctification and justification occur in the same instant in that the call to grace is a call to response on the part of man. In this unified sense of gospel and law as inseparable parts of the one act of the sovereign God in Jesus, we see why Barth can then say finally that the doctrine of God is ethics,<sup>30</sup> and this is of course the reason that Barth discusses ethics under the heading of the "command of God" in his larger section on the doctrine of God. God's nature as seen in Jesus is to confront man with His grace and to demand a response from man who is made free to respond (with his own response) by the intervention of God with grace in the first place. It is all one inseparable event being only artificially divisible into content and form, gospel and law.

If Gospel and Law are one whole integrated act of God in confronting-convicting-commanding grace, then the next question is the question of content. What is the content of the command of God in the act of grace? What is the content of man's response to God's command? Barth states that this content is Love and Praise, that is, man is called to respond to God's grace with love for God and praise of his mighty acts, that is, to witness to others to the whole event of grace-judgement of salvation.<sup>31</sup> In confronting God in the word man seems to be finally freed to love God and to know God where he could not before. Thus it would seem that there is a

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 513.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., I: 2, 362ff.

sense in which man can love now where he could not before. But man is not commanded to love God alone. He is also commanded to love his fellow man.

The content of this love becomes apparent in Barth's anthropology for the content of love in a human life is revealed by Jesus' life, and for Barth, Jesus' life defines anthropology. To be human is to be like Jesus.

#### IV

At last we are ready to return to Barth's anthropology and its implications for King. For Barth, as he sees the life of Jesus, to be human is to be in relationship with another man. We do not exist except in relationship to each other. It is the quality of this relationship which defines the quality of our humanity.

This relationship can be described in four types of interaction. They are presented in an ascending scale of intensity and represent cumulatively truly human life or fully mature humanity, true mutuality.

On the first level men are related by eye to eye contact. Men must see each other as men to realize their humanity together, and mutual seeing and being seen is the first act of intimacy in any relationship.

On the second level men are related by speaking and hearing. This is a more intimate contact in which each man attempts a deeper relationship with the other. He puts a part of himself out into the open for the other's inspection and he listens carefully to see what the other man is thinking, to see who the other man is.

On the third level, men engage in mutual assistance. Having seen the other man for what he is, having spoken to him and heard his reply, men now engage in mutual assistance. Each helps the other with the confidence that he will be helped in return. The element of trust begins to enter, and intimacy of relationship increases considerably.

Finally, on the fourth level men see each other and are seen, speak and listen, help and are helped, and do all of this with joy. This is the ultimate of human relationship as seen in the grace-judgement event of Jesus' life: that men be intimately related to each other with joy. And this is all purified and protected from degeneration into calculated self-concern by the love of God breaking into the heart of man to give man the redeeming capability of self-sacrifice for the sake of the relationship.

This concept of humanity has implications for King's struggle with the separation of men racially and the self-imposed segregation of Black Power.

King is concerned for reconciliation: that is, for truly human relationship between men. This cannot change. He sees this ultimately as integration, and so is unable to take any course which seems to be working in the opposite direction. So he rejects the separatism of Black Power. Yet if we employ Barth's model, self-imposed segregation can be seen within the context of reconciliation.

In the terms of Barth's model, King may be calling for a level of reconciliation in integration which is not yet possible. Black Power is saying, in Barth's terms, that the white man and the black man have not

yet even seen each other as men. Under integration and segregation the Negro is so dominated that the real man never shows through the fear and defeat. In Barth's terms, in order to get on the road to reconciliation black men and white men first must see themselves and each other clearly. This is going on now in Negro unrest. The Negro is standing up on his feet and screaming to be seen for the first time.

The separatism of Black Power is also an attempt by black men to stand together and be heard as separate and unique human beings. It is an attempt to make the white man hear his speech, to listen to those demands which will let him know who the Negro really is. Separation is necessary so that the white man will see and hear beyond his own false image to see and hear who the Negro really is. This is the beginning of the road to reconciliation. It must come before the mutual help within integration is ever possible. As interpreted through the ethical model of Barth's concept of man, as seen in Jesus, separation of the races may be the beginning of the reconciliation of the races. Integration, before true seeing or speaking or hearing has taken place, is no reconciliation at all. It only slows the course of true reconciliation.

Thus, there could be room in King's ethical system for temporary separation of the races, if he wished to employ the ethical insights of Karl Barth. Reconciliation is not sacrificed. It is merely seen in terms which are more realistic in today's situation. I believe that along this path there is room for King to move even farther toward Black Power without sacrificing either of his goals of Negro self-affirmation and interracial

reconciliation. He cannot and will not move to violence as a tool without sacrificing his ethics. But he can move toward a realistic acceptance of temporary separation. This is the direction of Black Power, and this seems to be the direction of the Negro freedom movement in general. Although he will never accept violence, I expect him to accept temporary separation in the near future, for Martin Luther King is a dedicated and flexible man and does not wish to be left behind.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WHITE CHURCH RESPONSE

Martin Luther King is dead. In the midst of my writing of this study, on April 4, 1968, he was struck down by an assassin's bullet on a motel balcony in Memphis. There has been much eulogy and much praise, great sorrow and more than a little blurring of the shape of the real man since that day. My own efforts to add to that body of praise and sorrow would pale in comparison to the eulogy which Martin Luther King unknowingly spoke for himself to a crowd in Memphis on the night before his death.

I don't know what will happen now. We have difficult days ahead, but it doesn't matter with me because I've been to the mountaintop. Like everyone else, I would like to live a long life. But I'm not concerned with that. I just want to do God's will and he has allowed me to go up the mountain. I see the promised land. I am happy tonight that I am not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

King's first comment looms as large for the white church now as it did for King when he spoke. In the face of his death, we and the rest of the country "don't know what will happen now." If the white church had any connection to the civil rights movement, it was through King. For the white church, King seemed to be the core of the movement and it was to King that the white church felt compelled to respond, in so far as it felt compelled to respond at all. But with his death two questions loom

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<sup>1</sup>Los Angeles Times, April 7, 1968, Sec. G, p. 1.

before us. What will be the new shape of the civil rights movement, and what must be our response to that movement?

King forecast the direction of the civil rights movement for the future in his own movement toward the goals of Black Power. In his own life time King saw the black man moving away from immediate integration and toward the creation of black pride and economic and political group power, and he followed this movement. He saw the movement evolving new tones of militance, and he followed here, too. Even as he moved with the movement he tried to maintain reconciliation of the races in tension with the new mood of black pride and organization, but as we saw earlier, in this last year that tension was straining to the breaking point. Now that he is dead no one of such prestige stands in the gap to continue to maintain this tension. Thus the movement of the black and white communities to polarization is likely to continue at a faster rate after the unifying sorrow of his death dissipates and white citizens and legislatures forget. Black Power in stronger and purer forms will be the reality to which the white churches must respond. This would have been true had King lived, for as he admitted at the beginning in Montgomery, the direction of the movement finally was in the hands of the people and not the leaders.<sup>2</sup> He could only hope to refine the effects of the wave. He could not keep it from breaking. With his death, what he could not hold back even more surely will come to pass.

If Black Power is the shape of the movement for the future, then what

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<sup>2</sup>King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 132.



must be the shape of the white church response? The general nature of our response is found in King's response to the same movement. When he saw the irreversable trend toward Black Power, King adopted the goals of Black Power--economic and political power for establishing justice. And he drove hard toward these goals to establish justice and to avert mass racial violence. The white church, too, must see the signs of the time and react to the positive within Black Power to avert the negative. Our response must be to facilitate just Black Power goals in order to establish justice to allow the black man to claim the maturity of self-direction and to avert the bottled up violence of frustration. What we should do and what we can and will do along these lines is a complex matter. These are several alternatives of varying importance and possibility.

On one level the church with real vigor might encourage black organization. Money is always needed, and although the white man cannot go now to the ghetto to lead, he has skills that the black man needs to learn for effective organization. Some sort of training programs and financial backing could be supplied by small groups within the church. However, it must be quickly added that this is the least likely alternative for the church to support. In the past it has been hesitant to pledge money to programs or to groups over which it has no control, and it is likely to continue in this attitude. In addition, except for government programs to which black men also contribute, only the most covert assistance from the white community can be accepted by the Black Power community. Except for the work of a few small agencies and individuals, the church is not likely to pursue this response.

Our response as a church then must be in the white community. But even here, there are several possible levels of response. At the most demanding level, the white church might form a political pressure group to attempt to force legislation and civic reforms to expedite black power goals. This happened to a surprisingly large extent in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This same kind of public pressure could be mobilized against local industry to speed the development of fair employment practices. Such pressure could be used against the local real estate industry to force fair housing practices, although the integration which this at first implies is no longer a priority black goal. Although this sort of concerted church action has taken place in the Pomona Valley, the hopes for widespread church pressure is not great. As long as the church is a center for fellowship in new communities needing social centers, it will not be able to unite around so controversial an issue or so controversial an action. Seldom is a church powerful enough to force an issue when it does unite. And yet the experience of churches in the Pomona Valley in uniting against individual real estate injustices demonstrates that this form of response is possible and is perhaps the ultimate commitment to be hoped for from the white church.

On another level the white church may begin to solve the problem within its own white community through the education and motivation of men of power and influence in the community. If the church cannot form strong pressure groups, it certainly can influence the thoughts and actions of those men in its congregations who do hold the reins of power. The machinery is there already to do this critical task.

Local pastors have access to most of the men of power in any community because of the basically middle class nature of the church. Some larger institutional forms already exist for the influencing of businessmen such as luncheons and conferences. If the opportunities now at hand were forcefully used and rigorously developed, the church could have a large role in the formulation of community and company policies through its powerful members. Thus the church could play a large role through these men in causing the white community to give concessions in job opportunity, job retraining, and fair housing, all so badly needed for the achievement of the black goal of economic power and self respect.

At the most basic level the church could expedite positive Black Power goals by public education. To a large extent the white community stands in the way of Black Power goals, and the black man could achieve much if the white man stood out of the way. Instead, the white community threatens to ensure violence by blocking Black Power goals out of ignorance and fear. The church could do much if it only educated its public on the myths of property values, the positive nature of Black Power goals, and the necessity for an atmosphere of calm, patience and understanding in relation to a necessarily stormy movement for justice. If the church could achieve no more than a spirit of moderation at the ballot box, it would have achieved a great deal. This is perhaps the most important service that the church both can accomplish and is likely to try to accomplish. One effect of King's presence in the movement was to buy time for both communities. Now that he is gone, the polarization of America into demanding black man and

resisting white men is likely to accelerate. If the black community is to build economic and political power for maturity and justice, it will need time, and time seems to be running out. A vital mission of the white church will be to buy that time by counseling patience and calm in a time of increasing unrest, educating its members in the ways they stand in the way of black growth, and helping them to move out of the way. And it will have to buy the time. Although this educational approach is the method most likely to be used in the church, it will still have its costs in membership and financial security. But if enough time can be bought to allow both the black and white communities to solve their problem before the forces of polarization plunge them into the abyss of covert and open racial war, then the cost will be well worth the return.

All that has been said thus far concerns the church's role in expediting the just goals of the black community. But even up to his death King's concern was two sided. Even while he shifted to the goals of Black Power he maintained a concern for the ultimate real reconciliation of both communities. The church well might follow his lead in this second area as well as the first. Certainly, the achievement of real power for the black man was his first goal and must be ours if only because the black community is not open to large efforts toward a too easy reconciliation. But ultimately, reconciliation must take place. If this is to happen, communication must be maintained between the communities for mutual understanding of actions and demands and conditions.

Exactly here the church could find its role. The church is in a

special position to interpret to a large part of middle class America, and it can use this position to interpret to it the events and concerns and demands of the ghetto. At the same time, the black church still remains enough within the black community to interpret to it the actions of the white community. A liason between the communities is essential both to slow the process of polarization and to leave the door open to ultimate reconciliation. The church, if it can draw itself up to be the church in reality, is suited particularly well to play this role, for it must be a sacrificial role. In the days of increasing polarization ahead, the man who stands in the middle to be able to talk to both groups can expect misunderstanding and reprisals from both groups. But, the church may be able to accomplish much if it can find itself strong enough to sacrifice itself for the communication between both groups.

In the final analysis, as King saw the direction of the movement so we must see the movement, and as he began to act toward Negro unity while leaving the door open for reconciliation so we must do the same. But the problem has often been not where the church would move but whether or not the church would move at all. King was moved by a dream. At Washington in 1963 he spoke these famous words.

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.<sup>3</sup>

The white church must be moved by this dream and teach its white society the dream or there can be no more dreaming. There is great danger that the white church and its white society will not wake up but will go on dreaming a far different dream. In that last speech at Memphis, King reminded his audience of the story of Rip Van Winkle, who went up on a mountain to sleep with a picture of King George hanging in the town and came down twenty years later to find a picture of George Washington in its place. Rip Van Winkle had slept through a revolution but in the words of Martin Luther King, "We cannot afford to remain asleep."<sup>4</sup> The great gift of his life was that it gave to black and white America a great dream. The great and tragic gift of his death may be that it awakens us at last from our false dreams.

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<sup>3</sup>Los Angeles Times, April 7, 1968, Sec. G, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

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